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THE SECRET MEMOIRS
OF
THE DUC DE ROQUELAURE

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SECRET MEMOIRS
OF THE
DUC DE ROQUELAURE

CHAPTER XV

The widow Poulard—Some resistance to a siege—I carry the position by assault—A meeting by night—A tiresome interruption—I beat a retreat— Lover-hunting—A chastisement inflicted on Roquelaure, which does not fall on me—My double—Ménébrolles—The middle-class Roquelaure—An Italian disguise—My friendship with Goodman Corbin—Comic ending of the adventure.

I MADE an infernal din. heard the old woman jump in her chair and overturn the foot-warmer. She came to the door, and, raising an iron bar that ran across the whole of her shop-frontage, cried out :

“ Ah ! you damned lackey, for it's only a scum of a serving-man that would worry folk thus, you can make up your mind for a reckoning with me.”

I took off my hat, so that she might recognise me immediately.

Madame Poulard unfastened the last shutter, and opened her mouth to overwhelm me with some gross

and astounding imprecation. . . . She could but utter these three words, that seemed to find their way from the pit of her stomach, and that with difficulty :

"It is *you* ?"

"It is I, superb Iris. What do you say of my alacrity ?"

"It may be the death of you, for old Corbin is not in bed yet."

"He will go there. In the meanwhile I will stay with you."

"Oh ! if that's it, there's nothing simpler. Come in, Monsieur le Marquis, come in."

"Very good ; and my dear Madame . . . Corbin . . . or I should say the charming . . . remind me of her Christian name . . . I have forgotten even that."

"Her name is Marielle."

"Marielle. Of course. I forgot for the moment. Is Marielle in her room ?"

"Better than that ; I believe she's in bed."

"Then I am going up."

"Wait a moment, my worthy gentleman. So much haste will spoil everything."

"It's putting off that spoils everything."

"You make a rare good lover, M. de Roquelaure ; you are not afraid to face anything."

"Not even you, Madame Poulard. And if I can't force the passage without an amorous encounter with you . . ."

At this point a little treble voice interrupted our conversation, and from the floor above I heard the following words, uttered with the slowness and confusion that characterise a person who has been suddenly awakened:

"Ursula, Ursula! what is the matter?"

"Do you recognise the bonny voice?" the second-hand dress-seller asked under her breath.

"Of course I recognise it."

"Wait here," said the widow, and she disappeared amid the windings of a dark little staircase that opened upon the back shop. I will say you are here, and you will soon know whether she is willing to—or, rather, whether she can—receive you."

Madame Poulard hurried up to the first landing, and I heard some muffled whispering. Unless I am mistaken, Madame Corbin was extremely surprised. After several half-stifled exclamations, I heard her say more clearly: "It's impossible . . . I shall be undone!" Then there was a long silence, and then the widow Poulard spoke again, but so low this time that I could not distinguish a syllable of what was said.

I was very anxious about the result of these lengthy preliminaries, and I must confess that my amorous impatience grew great. At last the second-hand dress-seller got to the end of her advocacy, and came down again. I gave her no time to speak, but

let fly one word at her, which sufficed to express the host of thoughts that swarmed within my mind.

"Well? Well?"

"Well, it is settled; she is waiting for you. Go up."

"She consents?"

"Can she deny you anything, my pretty rascal?"

"And her husband?"

"She will put out the night-light and bolt the door."

"Does she forgive me for disobeying her commands?"

"She must tell you that herself?"

"Let me go up then. I could use my time so much better upstairs."

Madame Poulard stood aside to let me pass, and within a second I was at Madame Corbin's door. As I crossed the threshold, I repeated to myself what I had learned about the adventure, and would gladly have persuaded myself I had been the hero of it throughout. The widow's gossip served as material for the review I made of the events—imaginary events, so to say—of the preceding evening and night. But though I took this precaution, and worked my memory very scrupulously, I had far better hopes of adding an air of reality to the part I played from the aid that my unknown victim would be sure to give me. This hope sustained me as I approached the fair one, who had just quitted the

sanctuary of her repose, and had hastily clothed herself in a becoming dressing-gown, the bosom and sleeves of which were embroidered with a fine white lace, which I was certain had come from the best English purveyors. The glance I directed upon her was at once eager and surprised.

Never yet had anyone appeared to me so seductive, so perfect and so pure as the charming Marielle Corbin. She was neither a woman of the people nor a woman of the fashionable world ; and while she had the distinction of the latter, she also possessed the healthy freshness of the former. I found combined in her those voluptuous invitations that we associate with the courtesan, and the bashful timidity of an inexperienced girl ; and at the first blush I could not judge whether I ought rather to carry her resistance by storm, as in the case of a coquette, or attempt her innocence, as in the case of a novice. In a word, her gaze was at once shy and bold, and I hesitated to forcibly attack a stronghold that seemed more likely to yield to the sweeter and tenderer influences of entreaty and persuasion.

Marielle had got out of bed, and was scantily clad, but innocence and purity encompassed her . . . I was almost abashed, and my emotion made me dumb. She approached me, and said :

“ You are rash. Why have you disobeyed me ? ”

“ Ask my heart,” I replied ardently.

“ But if *he* found you here ? ”

my character, my habits nor my wits. He was but a clown and only able to disgrace me.

It was imperative that I should repair the harm done and restore the accustomed lustre to my tarnished reputation.

So I replied to Madame Corbin :

" Why do you speak to me, sweet fair, of the Court and of Cardinal Mazarin? What are they to us? Now that you have given me auguries of your love, will you impose this hard behest upon me—that I must sacrifice hours, too short by far when reckoned by my desires, to alien interests and trifles? Do you think it is easy for me, now I am with you, to do aught but love you and tell you that I love you ? "

" Monsieur, Monsieur, I beg you to release my hand."

" I cannot."

" How ? After your promises ? "

" I vow upon my honour that I cannot remember having given any."

" Your memory is short."

" 'Tis no great misfortune . . . if my love lasts long."

" You will forget that like the promises."

" One word from those sweet lips will suffice to awaken it if it sleeps . . . one look from those lovely eyes will be enough to renew its flame, if the fire sinks."

"Can a single day," cried she, "thus change you? You are no longer the same man."

"You think so?"

"To break our compact at our second meeting!"

"Well . . . remind me of our compact . . . what was it that I promised?"

"To respect me, no matter what you felt."

"The deuce on't!"

"To give me a brother's friendship."

"I did? . . . That surprises me."

"And, in a word, to be completely submissive to all my wishes."

"I accept without complaint," I resumed, after a short pause, "all the obligations I contracted last night. I pledged myself to calmness and prudence, and will respect the engagement. So I am quite prepared . . ."

"To finish the story the end of which I am burning to hear?"

"Ah, you must allow me . . ."

My embarrassment was likely to be doubled, for the end of the story must perforce have some connection with the beginning, and I had no conception of what that had been.

An unexpected incident very opportunely relieved me from this awkward position. Marielle rose from her seat and crossed the room on tiptoe, as if some noise had suddenly reached her ears and attracted her attention.

I was about to question her, but she enjoined silence upon me. Then she leaned towards the joining of the casement and seemed to be listening.

"What is it?" said I in a low tone.

"Hush! I think I hear him."

"Whom?"

"My husband."

"Is he likely to come and discover us?"

"He never seeks admittance here at night."

"For a husband, that's very tactful."

"Please be quiet."

"I am dumb."

"We ought to have done as we did the first time, and had no light."

"I should have lost too much."

"What idle talk! Blow out the lamp."

I did as she bade me.

"Very well," said she. "I can see him now, for the moon is shining."

"Where is he?"

"In the garden."

"Is he spying on you?"

"I don't think so."

"But what has he in view?"

"How can I tell? He appears much excited. It looks as if he were shivering."

"No wonder--the nights are so chilly."

"He keeps wandering near to the end of the wall."

"Perhaps he is afraid of thieves."

"Oh, Heaven!"

"What is the matter?"

"He has a huge stick in his hand."

"I told you so. He is defending the premises."

"Monsieur de Roquelaure, you must leave me."

"Already?"

"You must."

"But . . ."

"Do you forget our covenant?"

"I will obey you."

This acquiescence won me a warm clasp of Madame Corbin's fair hand. She went at once to the head of the little staircase and summoned the old woman Ursula by a scarce audible sound, which she formed by the merest contact of her two lips. Then she led me to the door with some show of feeling and let me take, not far from the forbidden altar, a kiss, in which I presaged a thousand hopes for the future. The second-hand dress-seller, who had lost none of her composure at the alarm, interrupted our fairwells, which seemed likely to be repeated too often.

"Come, come," said she; "that is enough of it. Lovers have never done."

When I came forth into the street and heard Madame Poulard lock and bar her door, I walked slowly forward, my head still full of my visit to Marielle. My mind had been stirred by what had passed between us, and I had abandoned myself to

a thousand sweet imaginings, when I heard a clatter like that which a tom-cat makes on falling from the tiles. I hurried on, and saw someone flit off among the shadows. At the same moment a little gate was opened with a good deal of noise, and a man of some fifty years, of stout proportions and a diverting appearance, for he wore his nightcap, rushed into the dim thoroughfare and started in pursuit of the fugitive. The latter, in spite of his agility, was caught by the elder man, and then a scene was enacted between them in silence, in which I promptly intervened in the quality of a chance spectator.

"Eh! my friend," I cried out to him, "what harm has this poor fellow done that you treat him thus?"

The man in the cotton nightcap still showered his hearty thwacks about the fugitive's loins while he answered me:

"Go your way, monsieur, and don't meddle where you have no business. My name's Corbin, and I am well enough known in this neighbourhood to allow myself a bit of amusement like this, when needs must."

And while he spoke the blows fell as thick as rain-drops; it was a hailstorm of battery. The victim turned and twisted in a pitiable fashion, but Goodman Corbin had an iron wrist, and do what he would the fugitive missed not one of the salutations of the staff.

"Listen to what I have to say," I replied sharply enough, for the name Corbin had made me open my eyes and piqued my curiosity. "Whoever you may be, you have no right to take the law in your own hands, and I demand that you give me an account of the reasons you have for thus attacking . . . a harmless passer-by." Father Corbin stopped short in the middle of his task, but did not release his victim, who resembled a stubborn horse subdued by the sturdy hand of a skilful groom. He resumed in a less angry tone, but with a sort of shiver of impatience :

"You say, monsieur, that I have no right to take the law in my own hands . . . Well, who will set the law to work for me? Do they care about a poor devil like me? If a fine fellow visits my wife at night—and this fine fellow is one of your young exquisites from court—do you think they will pay much heed to it? They will tell me to shut my door, and look after what's my own, that's all."

"You may be right, but . . ."

"But . . . but! If I get a pair of horns, nobody will be so generous as to come and cut them for me. So I have to keep my eyes open . . . Now then, my pretty Cupid, let's go on with the lesson, or, to put it better, let us continue the dance."

The old fellow's arm was eager to be at work. He fell to it again with delight; and as he withstood all my attempts at mediation, I drew upon him, de-

invitation. So you will see me to-morrow at the hour appointed, fresh, merry, and in the best mood to enjoy myself."

The worthy husband re-entered his own premises and I remained alone with my double. He was pale with fear, and glared upon me with equal fury and fright, for I, like Corbin, had grasped him by the arm. He was thirty-five or thirty-six years of age, of a tolerably good appearance, but he had the common air of a trader; besides, he was an undersized fellow, and showed too many pretensions to elegance to be a man of real distinction. So I held him in check in the manner I have just described, and I waited two or three minutes that I might be quite sure Marielle's tyrant had gone within, then I shook the rascal several times in succession, to make him fully understand how serious were my observations, and said:

"My good adventurer in the paths of gallantry, you are a mere rogue and I make no more account of you than of an ass, a parasite, or a lackey. You would fain play the part of Jupiter and you have not a hundredth part of those powers which are needed if you are to descend upon your Danaë in the form of a shower of gold, or abuse your Leda by assuming the form and undulating motions of a swan. You would gladly play the seducer's part, and all that you lack for the *rôle* is seductiveness. Just now I know not whether I felt more shame

or pity for you. What? You were surprised by the husband in the very act of clambering to his wife's chamber and you have not a word to say for yourself; and you let him treat you like a lackey. And you pretend to be a Roquelaure—a Roquelaure! And you give cause for that name, a brave man's name, to be decried, set at naught, and insulted! In simple justice, I ought to lay as many strokes across your back with the flat of my sword as you have just got from the good man's stick, and yet, in spite of all my wrongs, you shall see how good-natured I am. I am willing to pardon you—but on one condition."

"What is it?"

"You must restore to me on the spot, what you have of mine in your keeping."

"What I have in my keeping?"

At this my man glanced with a frightened air at every article of his apparel from the ribbons of his shoes of Spanish leather to the knot by which he had fastened his embroidered collar.

"What do you mean?" he stammered with a fear he could not master. "I cannot see anything . . ."

"What I speak of," I interrupted severely, "covers your whole person, breathes in your words, and works in all your actions. What I speak of, is the substantial presentment of the inmost essence of yourself. If you prefer simpler language, it is the label on the sack. In three words 'tis your name!"

"What, you would deprive me of a title . . ."

"I would claim my own, nothing more."

"Your own? Do you mean to say you are . . .?"

"The Marquis de Roquelaure in person. Now, what do you think of it all?"

"Ah, Monsieur le Marquis, I have not a single excuse."

"You have no need to tell me that . . ."

"If you knew?"

"Do I not know too much already? But come now, it is as well to make matters quite clear. Who are you and what is your name?"

"I am a keen man after the women, and my name is Ménébrolles."

"And why, Monsieur Ménébrolles, when you have so sounding a name, did you think fit to steal mine, which, though it is very badly regarded by certain husbands who have an interest in disliking me, is no debtor to anyone, and cannot, in reason, serve for two men at the same time?"

"If I told you . . ."

"Well, pluck up your courage."

"Perhaps you would feel more lenient towards me."

"I will not say I should not; but I do not pledge myself to anything. Now for the explanation. I make no objection to listening to it."

"Well, Monsieur de Roquelaure, I borrowed your name just as a man gets a safe-conduct to pass more safely through an unknown country or a dangerous

pass. I am the son of an agent, who left me a small property. I have style that some others might envy ; I was crazy for novelty, and extremely taken with everything which promised to enliven my life with diversions. I should have cut a sorry figure in the world had I appeared in tradesman's guise as the bearer of a name which, far from originating amid the obscure past of the crusades, scarcely dates from the last years of the preceding reign. I think my only defect, my only disease, was pride, and if I had not found at the right moment the remedy for this relentless disease of the mind, I should have died of a paroxysm of repressed self-esteem. However, while I was in a neighbourhood where I was known, I was obliged to accept the situation as it was, and to show myself in my true character ; but I took a thorough revenge when I thought I was really left to myself, quite unknown, and free to put off my base condition and assume the magnificence of a nobleman. Then I became quite a different man. To use the word you employed just now, the label fell with the sack, and Ménébrolles—I must beg all your indulgence now, Monsieur le Marquis—Ménébrolles became the Marquis de Roquelaure, lord of Penguilhem and Gaure, and other places ! Then, you would scarcely believe the charming change that took place in my surroundings. You would scarcely credit my successes, my triumphs, all the secret joys I owe to this splendid cloak I had borrowed ; if Ménébrolles was

turned from the door, the Marquis de Roquelaure came in through the window. In this lucky disguise I won the favours that were refused me when I was but my father's son and sought to advance myself on my own account. But I beg you to believe that I should never have abused the privilege of my honourable disguise to commit a base deed. The women ! Monsieur le Roquelaure, the women ! They were my aim, my madness, my dream ; and as your name is an unequalled fairy's wand to dissolve all obstacles, a golden key that opens all the boudoirs, I have had—and I accuse myself of it with deep humiliation—the supreme audacity to appropriate it sometimes. Well, I can but confess it, Monsieur le Marquis, I admit between ourselves that I lacked some of the means to carry out so taxing a part. You have every grace, and my appearance is quite common. You are noble, and I am not ; and, to complete the comparison, which is to my disadvantage in every item, I might tell you, as one of your friends, M. de Voiture, lately told a gentleman whom he had incensed and who wished to make him take sword in hand : ' It is not fair play . . . you are big, and I am little ; you are brave, and I am cowardly . . . you want to kill me . . . very well, I will consider myself dead.' "

I could not help laughing at this excuse, which Master Ménébrolles had set out with a volubility worthy of a barrister or an attorney. I saw the

rogue was not wanting in wit, and I thought it would look silly in me to show annoyance at so simple a trick or be vexed about so trifling an offence. After all, his intention had not been so bad as it at first appeared, and there was matter in the explanation of his motives to gratify a vainer and more exacting man than myself. I should have scrupled to employ my advantages in overwhelming a poor wretch whose most grievous fault was that of believing in my reputation and carrying his admiration for me to the point of fanaticism. Besides, he awaited his sentence in so respectful and submissive a silence that I was suddenly possessed with pity for him, and I set him free, with the following remarks :

“ I will accept your explanation, Monsieur Ménébrolles, though it is not very reasonable nor very satisfactory. But I owe you some returns for the high opinion you have formed of me ; so I pardon you. But two words in your ear . . . I saw Madame Corbin to-night, and I pressed forward the work you had begun with her. She knows nothing of what has happened to-night. I expect that matters are to remain as they are, and that you will not try to follow in my traces. The place is taken ; you must seek elsewhere. Only in future try to be your own self, and leave me the full and complete ownership of my name. There are things which cannot be shared.”

And to take as much of the bitterness as I could out of this sharp address I offered him my hand. He seemed very grateful for this spontaneous proof of my good nature and clemency, and made off, after declaring that he recognised my rights to the fair Madame Corbin, and that he would certainly make no attempt in future to advance his own.

"You were the titular possessor," he added, "and now you are the *de facto* proprietor. Your rights being thus doubly established, I can but withdraw."

A moment later Ménébrolles had disappeared in the darkness of the little alley. I soon lost sight of him; and the difference of our stations rendered it unlikely that our meetings should be frequent. But I heard, with some degree of surprise, that this adventure had not been kept completely secret; in fact it was freely discussed. The result was that for some time after Ménébrolles was known as The Middle-class Roquelaure.

I came home quietly and slept late the following morning. At supper-time I turned my steps towards the Faubourg St. Antoine once more, and saw Goodman Corbin at his window. As soon as he recognised me, he waved a signal of friendship to me, and went within to tell his wife the news. In the meanwhile I had arrived, and while I lingered in the vestibule on the ground floor for a moment to put down my cloak, I heard the following conversation between husband and wife:

"I tell you, sir, that I wish to retire to my own room."

"I tell you, ma'am, that you are to stay with us."

"But I do not know this Italian."

"He is my friend, and he shall be yours."

"You are not particular as to whom you scrape acquaintance with. You have only seen this man once!"

"And then only by moonlight. Oh! quite so."

"If you are so jealous, why did you ask him to supper?"

"I like to choose my own friends."

"And so you take them at random."

"You would not have so much to say, ma'am, if I had invited that exquisite, that fop, that piece of impudence of a Marquis de Roquelaure . . ."

"What put that name into your head?"

"You need not trouble about my head, nor about the accuracy of my information. The other night I had him followed by people I can trust, this lovely swain, and I would stake my life on it he came from this house. They all told me it was Roquelaure, and I have given him such a cudgelling! As for worthy Signor Mateo Lippi, who came to my aid, and promised to complete my revenge . . ."

At this point I thought it well to appear before them. Marielle recoiled when she saw me, and stifled the cry which rose to her lips. When she saw that Mateo Lippi was the hero of her adven-

ture of the night before, she experienced so keen an emotion as would have betrayed her, if she had not been careful to suppress the signs of it.

Goodman Corbin came up to me, and said to me, with a mighty great laugh :

" Well, my gallant comrade, how did the little brawl end last night ? Did he show fight ? "

" Yes . . . and no," I replied without discomposure.

" Roquelaure, poor creature, was shaking with fear. I wager he ran like a hare that smells gunpowder."

" Pardon me, my dear Mr. Corbin," I answered with perfect self-possession, " you should not make those attacks upon people until you know them thoroughly, otherwise you may be deceived. This young man—Monsieur de Roquelaure, to give him his name—very likely restrained himself in dealing with you on account of your age and your grey hairs."

Monsieur Corbin looked at himself in the mirror, for his vanity rebelled at the description.

" But," I continued, smiling, " when he had to deal with me he recovered his courage and his vigour as well. The Roquelaure blood is no rose-water, Monsieur Corbin, and is as fiery as anyone else's under the irritation of threats and insults. I picked a quarrel with him, and he answered me as a gentleman should. The explanation took place within a hundred yards of your door."

"Ah!" said the worthy man, much interested, "and the result was . . .?"

"A mere scratch."

"That you received?"

"No, that he had from me."

"Ah, so much the better."

"It was at the wrist . . . a mere trifle, nothing at all. But let us speak of other things. Madame, allow me . . ."

And, bowing to Marielle, I winked at her in such a way as to make it plain that I would clear up the riddle on the first occasion we might be alone together. She understood me perfectly, and we went to table at once in the best humour. We all had our reasons for being delighted; Marielle had got me back when she thought she had lost me; Goodman Corbin had got rid of the rival that haunted his imagination, and I had slipped into the fold like a wolf in a lamb's skin.

This little arrangement lasted about three weeks. At the end of that time, being upon the point of leaving Paris, my relations with Marielle were interrupted for the time. I shall never forget how, the day when I came to bid farewell to Master Corbin, he said to me with a very clever look:

"Now you see. In dealing with women there is nothing like prudence. The Marquis de Roquelaure was my aversion, and I could scarcely tell you why, for I had never seen him. Well, fatality pursues us; the devil would have it that he should pick out my

wife. But I settled it, and he has taken good care not to try his fortune again since the night when I gave him his cudgelling. Lay the lesson to heart, my dear Mateo, and if you ever marry . . ."

"I shall not marry," I answered promptly. "It is too perilous; and besides, I could not make sure of being as clever as you . . ."

The compliment took effect, and the worthy man had a fine air of pride as he wished me more prosperity than I deserved.

As I was to be away from the capital for several months, I made a series of visits which I might have regarded, as a settling of my love accounts. I went in succession to Mesdames de Guéménée, de Lavernay and d'Alibon. I found the ladies extremely kind, with the exception of the second, who was still sticking in the mire of politics and carried her hatred for the King's chief minister to the point of saying that the west wind was one of Mazarin's following, because it brought the wet. Her conversation had become intolerable. As for the Princesse de Guéménée and Madame d'Alibon, their one occupation was to be lovely, and this is an admirable occupation when a woman succeeds in it.

I was engaged upon the preparations for my departure during the two following days and as I was now obliged to travel to and stay in my estate in Haute-Guyenne, I had had all made ready for so long a road, and, upon this occasion, raised Bruscamville

to the dignity of a confidential servant. The worthy fellow, who had never seen but Rouen, where he was born, and Paris, where he had been in my service, was mad with joy about it. I had him suitably dressed from head to foot and took care that he should be recognised by the rest of his fellows as a superior. When all this business was despatched, we set out but took the longest way round, for we proceeded first to Lyons, where I took part in or witnessed several adventures that will form the subject of the following chapters.

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CHAPTER XVI

Lyons—The castle of La Tour Roquelaure—The Avenel family—My scruples—Explanations—I square accounts with La Tour—A case of conscience—My principles—I get back to my story—Monsieur and Madame find great difficulty in agreeing—A notion which puts them at one—A singular plan—I make up my mind to learn the consequences of it—The trysting-place at night—The mystery of a dark coppice—A strange mistake—The result of an indiscreet test—Madame Avenel was right—What a vile fellow my cousin was—The lady confides in her husband—Conjugal love yields to maternal love—Deceived and happy—La Tour and I quit Lyons together.

My object in going by way of Lyons was to see my cousin, La Tour Roquelaure, of whom I have already made mention, and who had gone thither to enjoy his first fruits of a small estate that one of his uncles on the mother's side had left him by will; and he meant to have a merry house-warming in the place. I found him highly pleased with his new domain, and the situation of it was indeed as agreeable as could be desired. The little castle, for it was no less, with battlemented tower, postern gate, and drawbridge, was built upon the high ground that overlooks the Saône, and was a veritable home of a high and mighty seigneur of the feudal times. I

took up my quarters there at my ease, and in a little while the two Roquelaures became a centre on which the eyes of every lady in the neighbourhood were turned, and the subject of all the gossip.

We resolved to remain at Lyons as long as we found it to our liking, which shows plainly enough that we had no settled schemes. La Tour's character resembled mine in many respects, and we were just adapted to agree with one another as to the way of passing our time. So it turned out. Besides, we made it an absolute rule never to incommode ourselves and never to sacrifice the supreme interest of our welfare and happiness to supposed obligations. Complete independence, observed on both sides, was the base of our comradeship and friendship; and it is the best base.

To avoid speaking incessantly of myself, I will here recount a very diverting story, the whole course and development of which came within my cognizance, though I played no part in the affair beyond that of a keen onlooker and interested observer. It concerns my cousin La Tour, and will go to show that he was a true Roquelaure and worthy of the blood that ran in his veins.

On the very first day after my arrival he took me to the house of a Monsieur Avenel, a former Comptroller-General, whom he had met at Monsieur d'Olonne's, in Paris, and who had asked him to dinner every day since he had come to Lyons. No

doubt, La Tour would have found this daily dish very insipid if it had not been accompanied by just the spices that were needed to give it flavour. Madame was a very fine woman of thirty-four or thirth-five years of age, and had been married to the Comptroller when she was but fifteen. That was not all, for she had a very pretty daughter, close upon her twentieth year, whose charms equalled those of her mother—neither surpassing them nor falling short of them—in this acceptation: that she made up with her fresh youth what the other enjoyed by way of distinction and nobility. Anyone who had seen them together, without knowing them, would certainly have thought that they were sisters.

I found it very difficult to discern at first to which La Tour was directing his addresses. I watched them, I observed their faces, I played spy upon their glances, but I got no further into the secret. La Tour was one of those lively but astute men who do not jeopardise the success of their attempts by silly indiscretion, and in love intrigues all his art consisted in disarming conjectures and putting the suspicious upon a wrong track. He showed as much consideration for the mother as for the daughter, and, take the matter how one would, either supposition was equally probable, though to judge by the rule of my own taste the mother should certainly have the advantage. However, he did not leave me too long in my uncertainty, but confessed to me that he was seriously

enamoured of the younger woman. Of course, I could not blame him. Twenty summers make too fair a show for anyone to blame the taste which appreciates it. I honestly complimented him on his good luck, for he had been able to discern that he was loved in return. At the same time he made me give him an assurance, and I did so very willingly, that I would not meddle with that concern of his. "For," said he, "I shall have need of all my experience, and all the wit I have in it." I reserved but one right, and that was to help him in case of need, and to be his backer in every necessity, whether it concerned the sword, the purse or the feelings.

A month passed without any remarkable incident. La Tour continued to make his way. We were very frequent and punctual in our visits, though I was somewhat less so than he, and I concluded that things were rapidly progressing, for he now began to be very reticent in his avowals. I had but few scruples when the matter in hand was some light o' love affair, but where the honour of a young girl was concerned in a light-headed fellow's adventures of gallantry, I was more susceptible. I took my cousin aside one day, and begged him to answer me frankly.

"I promise you I will," said he.

"Well," I resumed, with a kind of solemnity, "tell me, what is your real design upon the charming Lucile Avenel, and do not turn a deaf ear to me on

this subject? A man should not reject good advice when he who offers it is truly a friend."

"Speak, and I will answer as if you were a judge."

"If you answer as to a friend, it will be enough."

"Go on; I am listening."

"Do you love Lucile?"

"What a question!"

"Seriously?"

"The word is a melancholy one, but I accept it as it stands."

"Would you, for her sake, make all possible sacrifices?"

"All! though it were my life which should be demanded."

"Your life? Your life? Would you be so prompt to give her your hand?"

"Why not, if she would accept it?"

"You mean it?"

"Assuredly."

"I thought you were a foe to hymen."

"Lucile Avenel would reconcile me to hell."

"Good; now I am at ease both about her and about you."

As I was giving some countenance to my cousin La Tour's designs, I was very pleased to have my conscience set at rest upon this point. Perhaps certain people will be surprised to find me so punctilious, and will hardly understand how I could

reconcile principles which seem so severe with that indulgent tolerance on which I usually piqued myself. Such objections are not new to me, and my readers will allow me to answer them by a short and simple explanation. Gallantry, as I understood it, neither included impudent unscrupulousness nor the excesses of vice. It is true that I liked to live my life merrily, but I should have regretted that any of my light amusements should cost anyone a tear; and though I put in practice, without any too deep examination of it, the philosophy of Anacreon, Tibullus and Epicurus, I should have thought shame to drag the innocent victims of criminal pleasures behind my chariot of mirth. It is a sentiment which would seem inconsistent in me if it were not sometimes found in the hearts of the least scrupulous men; but the fact is that I felt an involuntary and, as it were, instinctive respect for that transparent, white, star-embroidered vesture—a young girl's virginity; and, in spite of the ardours of my senses and the eagerness of my desires, the innocence of such an one was in my eyes something sacred, heavenly and inviolable. The intentions of La Tour being thus declared to me, I felt more at ease, and I troubled him no further, but resumed my former character of confidant, sometimes helping, sometimes listening.

This has been a very serious digression in the midst of a very trivial story, but happily the end of the tale will atone for the beginning, and, after all,

I am not so constant to the didactic vein that I may not be pardoned for falling into it once haphazard. It is a slight exception which does not prevent me from returning to my rule. To resume.

All things are not rosy in love. Each intrigue, even the easiest and least opposed, has its reverse side, as each medal has. Love is a sun which draws up clouds, and from this it follows that the heavens may be suddenly darkened and storms may break when it is least expected. La Tour was the object of Lucile's sweetest glances, and I can answer for it that under the well sustained fire of deadly *oeillades* my cousin behaved as a sturdy and fearless soldier. In fact, things had made such progress that in less than a fortnight the innocent maiden and her bold cavalier had quitted their earlier positions, she that of defence and he that of attack, and I felt assured that the two camps had joined, united by a tacit treaty of alliance and a silent exchange of agreements, the bearing of which I leave you to guess.

The father was a man of weak and careless disposition, who professed boundless friendship for La Tour, or to put it with more exactness, a blind infatuation. He swore by my cousin, and was never so happy as when he could monopolise him for an hour or two for his game of basset or piquet. That was the smooth side of the affair; but the seamy side was Madame Avenel. This charming lady was not very well disposed towards La Tour, and nothing

short of his burning passion for the daughter could have rendered him insensible to the ungracious reception he sometimes encountered from the mother. It was not easy to explore the secret of her coldness; but I thought I could thus interpret it; that Madame Avenal though she was an excellent woman at heart, had reached that age at which, to her great regret, she stood between a vanishing past and a threatening future. She loved Lucile, she wished to see her child happy—that was a matter of course—but when all was said and done her child was no longer a child, on the contrary, her face bore the inscription of her age in an exquisite legend of freshness, youth and beauty. She was no longer a little flower to be carried in the hand or worn for adornment in the girdle. She was a young sapling whose shade began to spread all around, and that is the kind of shade which frightens other women. So, according to my view, Madame Avenal was jealous and I think, if the truth were known, she only saw one fault in my cousin, that he had dared to make a rash and . . . impertinent selection in the house where she herself was still so brilliant and so well preserved.

One morning when I had lain abed longer than usual, I was awakened with a start by the bell of our little castle, loudly pealed by an imperious hand. I found it was La Tour who had returned and was finding fault with his servants and upsetting everything that had the ill-luck to stand in his way. A

minute or two later he entered my room with a perturbed air.

"What is the matter," cried I, turning a somersault which brought me seated plumb on the edge of my bed. "You have the grim and melancholy look of a Huguenot who is on his way to hear the sermon at Charenton. What is it? Are you going to tell me?"

"The matter," replied La Tour, in a very ill humour, "is, that everything is spoiled."

"What? What is spoiled?"

"Why, my marriage."

"By what mischance?"

"Mischance? You should rather ask by what fatality, for there is a long chain of misfortunes to tell of, that I scarcely understand myself. You remember how we spent the evening?"

"Of course I do. It was well employed and well filled . . . while you were playing cards with the father, your eyes were holding mute conversation with the daughter, and I was just beginning to appreciate the real value of her mother's charms, and become seriously enamoured of them."

"If that is so, you should have been more attentive, more zealous, more enterprising."

"And why so, if you please?"

"Why? Because that would have kept her mind occupied, and she would not have seen what she saw."

.

"Upon my soul, unless you speak more plainly . . ."

"Well here's the story. You know that for the last week we have been subjected to the most intolerable prying, and that I have been unable to exchange a single word with Lucile."

"I know. You have been reduced to signs."

"And they are a dangerous language."

"And sometimes obscure . . ."

"Well, last night I was burning with impatience to bring my uncertainty to an end I longed to hear from Lucile's own lips the avowal that her eyes have so constantly repeated, I had prepared a letter in which I begged her to meet me to-night—at midnight—in the little wood we so often frequent during the day, a place that seems to have been fashioned for tender dreams and secret trysts."

"You read me your letter. 'Twas written in a fine vigorous style."

"And the meaning unmistakable?"

"Oh, there was no doubt about the meaning."

"That's it, and my hopes are ruined!"

"What? Are you in your senses? Do you think it would have been better if your letter had been one of those ill-compounded and confused hotch-potches which prove nothing about the writer except that he is a pretentious fool?"

"Ah, if only my letter had been like that!"

"Upon my honour, I do not take your meaning."

"You soon will," said La Tour. "When her father and I had finished playing, you remember that we all gathered in a ring and talked of one thing and another without much serious attention to any of them. The conversation was turned, I forget how, to the intrigue of the Duc de Beaufort and the growing and insufferable demands of the *parlement*. You took the part of Mazarin, as your habit is, and Madame Avenel, from a spirit of contradiction perhaps, defended the outcry of the suffragan and his partizans. Her worthy husband began to doze in his chair, and as for me, I thought it well to have no fixed opinion, especially as I had other fish to fry. My eyes incessantly followed the charming Lucile, and I think I can assert that though we made less noise than you, we talked the most ravishing, the sweetest nonsense to one another. So I took advantage of a moment when Madame Avenel appeared to be thoroughly interested in what you said: I drew my letter from my pocket, I showed it furtively to Lucile, and then I slid it under one of the cushions of an easy chair that was close beside me. Was I dreaming? In what accursed spheres could my mind have been wandering then? I thought I perceived that Lucile perfectly understood my action and devined my idea. I even thought that her eyes sought to explore beneath the cushion to discover what I had hidden there. And then we made our adieux, I full of pride at

little feat, and you convinced that your rather wordy eloquence had caught the mother's attention and that you had done all in your power to favour my strategem."

"True; all that is exact . . ."

"To a nicety. And I had faith in it an hour ago. But I have just come from the Place Belle-court, where I had told Flipote, the lady's-maid, who is in my pay, to bring me her young mistress's reply."

"And Flipote did not come?"

"Yes, she came."

"Then what harm is done?"

"You would learn if only you would let me finish. Lucile had not understood my signs."

"The deuce!"

"She had not read my letter."

"Why, here's a muddle!"

"And her mother—yes, her mother—as soon as she was alone with her husband, opened it, passed her comments on it, and put her own interpretation on it. Flipote was there; she repeated, word for word, what the two said to one another. 'Well, do you believe me now?' Madame Avenel asked. 'Will you still defend your fine Monsieur La Tour?' 'Why not? I cannot see wherein the young man is so very guilty.' 'What, sir! an insolent fellow dares to propose a secret meeting to your daughter and you try to make excuses for him!' 'I have

been young myself,' replied Monsieur Avenel, 'and I say that before condemning young people . . .'
'And I say that Monsieur La Tour shall never be my son-in-law.' 'But really, my dear, I should like to know what his shortcomings are. You are very prompt to accuse a young man who seems, as far as I can see, too kindly, too well-bred and too well-placed in the world to be dismissed thus lightly. You know that I like him cordially, and that is why you cannot bear him. Such contradictions are to your taste, but it is well not to be too hasty in these affairs. We should have been very blind if we had not perceived that this young man is a suitor for our daughter's hand, and he has the best reasons for hoping we shall consent. To-day I see his purpose very well . . . What he seeks is, before he makes his formal declaration, to learn from Lucile, herself, if he is acceptable to her, if his person pleases her, in fact, if she loves him. Is this so great a crime?' To this Madame Avenel answered sharply, 'I have no confidence in those ungoverned lovers, whose dearest delight is to increase to the very utmost of their power the red letter days in their chronicle of amours. M. La Tour is one of these hairbrained fellows, and I say their influence is harmful and their society dangerous. If you wish me to express my whole thought in half a dozen words, it is this: he does not love Lucile and his sole purpose—I would almost swear to it—is to seduce her and then abandon her.' There-

upon, as Flipote told me, the father got in a great rage and swore he knew no more honest man than I. The lady answered him back, and this increased his passion. At length she made the following proposal to her husband as a means of discovering what were the aims of M. La Tour. She said that she would dress herself in Lucile's clothes and that, at the appointed hour, she would be at the trysting-place, to discover for herself how far my boldness and my pretensions went. Now you see, cousin, where my stratagems have brought me, and how my guns have suddenly been spiked . . . What is your advice."

I had been thinking deeply while I listened to La Tour. At first I let fall a response that was scarcely likely to guide him :

" Hum, hum," said I.

" What do you think about it ? " he asked.

" It's a serious matter. Give me time to reflect upon it,"

" Well, reflect. I will wait."

I remained for a moment in a meditative attitude worthy of a diplomat on whose decision the fate of an empire should depend, and then I slapped my forehead, and asked him :

" You are not taking your first lesson in love ? "

" No, indeed," said he.

" And so I suppose your letter was not addressed ? "

" Of course not."

"Then you are none the worse."

"Do you think so?"

"Well, everything can be set right."

"My cousin," said La Tour, "you are my friend, and more—you are going to save me."

"Well, you may think of me as you will. But first of all, hear what I have to say."

"I know how experienced you are. You shall be the master and I the slave. Give your orders—I will obey them."

"The conduct you must hold is ready mapped out for you by common sense. You will not go to the meeting."

"That's well enough. But the letter?"

"The letter! Is that anything so very serious? The letter fell from your pocket by chance, you know not how, through the kind of carelessness of which we see examples every day. It was for someone else . . . for some woman who lives somewhere or other . . . no matter where, on the outskirts of the town, and you must leave Lyons to-night and not return till to-morrow. That little excursion for thirty hours is necessary to dispel all suspicion. On your return to-morrow they will hasten to hand you the ill-fated letter. Thereupon you will affect surprise and say—as if you were impelled to it by a kind of itch for talking, that you will feign to be sorry for afterwards—'Ah, lackeys are all alike. It was left in my pocket, and I thought it had been taken to its address and accused

my poor little friend of breaking her word.'"

"All that is splendid," said La Tour, interrupting me. "But suppose this fine story gets to Lucile's ears?"

"If she happened to take it in ill-part I would undertake to get you an interview with her, and then you could bring her to reason."

"And that would soon be done . . . love gives a man eloquence."

"And you are such a fine speaker, even when you have not the stimulus of love!"

This little flattery made La Tour smile. I saw that he had come to the last extremes of sentiment, and wit usually abandons a man in this condition. We accepted this plan without further discussion and then each went his way, but we appointed to meet on the following day at Avenel's house. He wandered first in the neighbourhood of the town, sighing and dreaming as is a lover's wont; and then, as he was determined that he would not succumb to the temptation of going back to the Place Bellecourt in the evening, he took horse and went to a village near by, and so acted on my imaginary history, for he passed the night there. When he left me I hired a boatman and spent a part of the day, making him row up the Rhone and show me the finest sites in the country which is bathed by the headstrong current of that noble river. Absorbed in thought and lulled by the gentle movement of the frail skiff, I could not help

recalling the various incidents of my visit to Lyons, and amidst the images evoked by recollection, there was one which constantly reappeared and obstinately held my fancy. It was the form of a woman, a stately shade that passed and passed again amidst my reverie, with a head as of a goddess that impressed me by its proud and majestic mien and attracted me by its looks.

While this partial sleep weighed upon my eyelids, though I felt in perfect possession of all my faculties I whispered, as if to satisfy the secret movements of my heart :

“My cousin may say what he likes. The mother is not inferior to the daughter either in grace or beauty.”

Now I have revealed my secret to the reader. He sees that I am enamoured of the charming Madame Avenel and in his indignation, inspired by a purity worthy of the patriarchal age, he exclaims, “Yet another !” He will see plenty more.

But being enamoured is not everything. The future must show some possibility of effecting the purpose, or at least, of setting the intrigue afoot. But at present my conduct towards Madame Avenel had lacked all significance, and had been purely negative. Little attentions, the light air of gallantry, or even the politest homage is not sufficiently positive evidences of passion to call forth valuable results, and a woman who is accustomed to the flatteries of the

world has every right to attribute these innocent little displays to courtesy or mere deference. So that though I secretly cherished a strong liking for Madame Avenel, I had the best reasons for fearing she would not have perceived the fact, and, to borrow some military phrases, confessed, to my regret, that the plan of the siege was not even sketched, that my batteries were reposing in their winter quarters, and that I had no fixed resolve, nor settled scheme, nor means ready to hand, and that, in a word, the campaign had not even begun.

I will avow that this position of affairs alarmed me. I was, indeed, completely free as to my movements, but our stay at Lyons could not be prolonged indefinitely. When the time for departure came, it would be very difficult to defer it, and I ran great danger of sighing for the fair in vain and being driven to seek insipid consolation in some other quarter. These difficulties, these obstacles, I may almost say this impossibility, whetted my pride and added fuel to my love. My passion for Madame Avenel was so much the more ardent and ungoverned that I thought of her as a vision ready to fly away or vanish before my eyes.

Then my ideas underwent a sudden change. I expunged from my thoughts the very notion of resignation and murmured to myself, while the boatman rowed his strongest.

“Why should I bow to that which seems to be

necessity? Does this Necessity, this blind, deaf and merciless goddess, exist in the world? Should man who is so powerful when he exerts his will, give way before this or that circumstance, because it seems to him unfavourable or plainly hostile to him? Not so. A strong will is the key of all the doors of every earthly paradise, and when a man has firmly covenanted with himself that he will succeed, no matter what the conjuncture of events may be, it rarely happens that he cannot keep his word. The great point is to find some powerful, apt and certain means, and in this case such means—”

I meditated for a minute or two. I shut my eyes, as I suppose a mathematician does when he is seeking the solution of a problem, I snapped my fingers in my impatience, and then, on a sudden, I rose from my seat and cried aloud:

“The means—I have hit upon it!”

The boatman looked at me in amazement, for I have no doubt he thought I was losing my wits. I cannot assert the contrary, and I leave my readers to decide upon the point.

I passed all the rest of the day in a state of agitation which is difficult to describe. When I returned to the town I wandered up and down without being able to decide in detail what were my projects. And yet I seemed to be under the sway of one of those intoxications of the mind from which triumphs spring and which carry the clumsiest mortals to success. I

may spare further explanations, for it will be understood that at midnight I betook myself to Monsieur Avenel's park. It was a fine stretch of land, enclosed on one side by a brick wall and on the other by a hedge. I chose the latter as my way in. I made one shove of it through the bush that was in my path, and soon reached the thrice happy coppice. Now, as was natural, the young lady had gone to bed at her usual hour, for she had not received the famous letter, but Madame Avenel had faced all the dangers of a dark night, and came up to me, feeling her way.

I own that I did not expect as much. That a mother should take her daughter's place at such a meeting by night seemed to me so strange and improbable, that I had feared I should have only my trouble to repay me. Nothing short of the fact could have abolished my doubts, but in spite of them I was bound to believe what I saw.

Now shall I relate, in all its details, that scene amidst the darkness and shadows of the night, in that fragrant recess, above which the vault of heaven was veiled with mist, and where reigned a silence scarcely broken now and then by the inexplicable murmurs of the night? Shall I recount all the inspirations which came to Madame Avenel and to me in the solitude, and amidst the mystery which seemed intended to overthrow the reign of reason and excite the senses? To give each sentiment its due share in the affair, it must not be forgotten that

each of us was playing a part ; and that instead of an experienced wife and a gay cavalier, there were Lucile, a maid in her innocence, and La Tour, a candidate for her hand, violently enamoured. Madame Avenel played the former rôle, and I the latter. I remembered the words Flipote had quoted as if I had just heard them : " I want to make sure for myself how far his audacity and his pretensions will carry him." At the risk of compromising La Tour, and of using the decisive moments otherwise than he, perhaps, would have employed them, I gave the *soi-disant* Lucile not a moment's peace. I knew that I was tackling no novice, that my opponent in the game knew how to defend herself, and I scrupled not to make a direct attack on the supposed innocence of the personated young lady. I besought, and that with tears, I talked of dying, and to prove my identity with my dear absent cousin, I did not forget to promise marriage. At this word, I felt Madame Avenel's hand tremble in mine, and I concluded that her anger could scarcely be controlled. . . . I prepared to bear the brunt of it, but it was a false alarm. Madame Avenel found sufficient energy to restrain her indignation. Then I thought she had resolved not to judge La Tour superficially, that she meant to show due impartiality, and would not condemn his intentions unless she had a certain and irrefutable proof of their perversity. A timorous nature would have drawn back in my situation ; I pushed forward.

I was sure that I should not in any way impede La Tour's enterprise, because the truth must inevitably be known later. The demon of mad passions inspired me with an eloquence at which I myself was astonished; I overbore my victim with protestations, with impossible vows and impassioned prayers . . .

Half an hour after, when we heard a noise of footsteps from the direction of the house, she rose from the bank of turf on which she had been sitting, and pointing out to me the way I should take to reach the quick-set hedge, she said to me, in tones in which deep emotion and violent anger seemed joined in a singular accord⁴.

"Fly, sir, I hear someone, and it is probably my husband, who wonders why I have not returned. You understand that there can be no further relations between us, and that my daughter shall never be given to you. I rely on you not to come into my presence again."

I said not a word but disappeared into the covert, but not before I had snatched from her bosom a favour of blue ribbons she was wearing, which I meant to preserve as a keepsake. But then, instead of following my path, I suddenly stopped and retraced my steps by a side track, and thus approached the clump of trees again without my presence being suspected. The cause of my return was the commencement of a smart passage of words which had almost instantly begun, between husband and wife, and

I burned to overhear it. With care and precaution, I managed to conceal myself within half a score of paces from the speakers, and I heard the following conversation very plainly.

"Zounds, Madame," said the ex-comptroller, in a rallying tone, "you have made it your business to prolong the talking. I might almost think you relished the company . . ."

"You are a fool."

"You must not be angry about such a trifle, my dear. Monsieur La Tour is a very agreeable young gentleman."

"So agreeable—that I hate him—even more than before."

"Ho, even more! What fresh crimes has he perpetrated then?"

"Ah, if I were to tell you."

"'Tis some trifle . . ."

"Do you think so?"

"Well, tell me about it."

"No. Let it be enough for you to know that he must never be Lucile's husband."

"Oh indeed! But come—we must not behave like children," said Monsieur Avenel, in his unctuous tones. I've a great weakness for this young man, I own, and that is a reason for my not condemning him till I have heard what harm he has done. Did he come to the meeting?"

"Oh, he was quite punctual."

"Did he think he was speaking to Lucile?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And had you entered into the spirit of your part so thoroughly that when you saw him coming to . . ."

"I played it only too well."

"Now you are letting your feelings get the better of you again. Be calm, Madame Avenel, be perfectly calm, if possible. So he thought he was alone with my daughter?"

"How many times must I tell you so?"

"Oh, a long examination is sometimes the best examination. I have been a magistrate, Ma'am, and I like to see right into the cases that come before me.

"What did he say to you?"

"Ah, if he had merely said things . . . !"

"Then what did he do?"

"Do not bother me."

Madame Avenel sought to retire, but her husband detained her with a vigour that scarcely seemed consistent with his tranquil and indolent character.

"Wait a minute. I have an idea of what he has been doing, and I want to know if I have guessed right."

"I vow you have not," said the lady, in the most convincing tones.

"Oh! but I think I have," replied the ex-president, with a cunning air. "Have not I done

the same in my time? He took your hand like that, did he not?"

"Perhaps."

"He caressed it, and lightly kissed it, almost like this?"

"I will not say he did not."

"He knelt before you?"

"Possibly."

"And then he exacted from you a solemn pledge that you would belong to none but him?"

"And do you think, sir, I warned a man off for trifles of that kind, or should consider our relations ended with a gentleman for such wretched and absurd reasons as those?"

"You alarm me, ma'am. Did he forget the respect due to my wife—I mean, to my daughter—so far as to misbehave? Did he approach your waist?"

"That would not have been anything."

"Ah! I see. He claimed a lock of hair. In my time that was our way, when we were lovers . . . a lock of hair."

"You do not understand."

"Oh! well, come. I did not mean to say so much, but, after all, we must remember that he is twenty-five, and judge him by ourselves at that age. A fine night, no witnesses, a dark grove . . . He took a kiss. And if he did? 'Tis no irremediable evil, a kiss. She will give him a score for his trouble when they are married."

"Sir," replied Madame Avenel, whose voice revealed the disdain she was obliged to repress, "you incite me to say things . . . but no! I will restrain myself. But I would have you know that what you have been imagining is not near the truth."

"How? What? What was it?" cried the ex-president, in a fright.

"Do not let us go from one extreme to another. Be calm, as you advised me. I had to carry the experiment to a point at which mistake was . . . impossible."

"So! And you are quite certain?"

"Quite."

"But . . . allow me . . . Madame . . ."

"Put yourself at ease," replied Madame Avenel, in agitated tones. "I think I have succeeded in saving everything; but I can now assert, from full knowledge, that if my daughter had been in my place she would have been exposed to the attempts of a man without delicacy and without loyalty."

It was a rough kind of compliment. Happily it did not concern me alone, for La Tour had his share in it. Monsieur and Madame Avenel directed their steps towards the house in silence. I heard the worthy president mutter, as he moved off much more intent upon the imaginary perils his daughter had run than on the real ones which his wife had faced.

"So he would have seduced Lucile, or at least have attempted it . . . Oh, what are men!"

"They are monsters."

"And their affected loyalty . . . their pretences of virtue."

"They can never be trusted," said Madame Avenel dogmatically.

It was a droll conclusion, and I was glad to be alone at length to breathe freely again and to reflect at my ease. How much had happened in a brief space of time! I had succeeded beyond my hopes, and I know not by what happy conjunction of circumstances my success had been assured. Madame Avenel, after what had passed, was still a puzzle to me; as for her husband, I thought him mad to some extent, and when I asked myself what epithet would suit myself, I was very undecided whether I deserved the description of a free and easy young fool or a gentleman criminal. With a little goodwill and the aid of some subtle solution, which any philosopher would be able to discover, the two terms might have been fused to compose one that would fit me exactly. But, after all, that was the lightest of my cares. And I had no leisure to carry this delicate examination of my conscience very far. It was late, Lyons was not a very safe town by night, and I made the best of my way back to the castle. I had bidden Bruscombille await me at an inn facing the bank of the Rhone, and I found him there at his post with a flask in front of him containing a brandy which had a fine bright colour to the eye, but was hardly likely to taste as

well as it looked. I think he had drunk a little beyond what he could carry, for I had to speak thrice to him before he was aware of my presence. At length I got into the saddle again and in less than half an hour we were at home. That night I had a constant succession of dreams which recalled what had taken place but gave me no new ideas about it. In that matter, dreams are like parrots. They can repeat, but without intelligence.

I expected I should see La Tour very early on the following morning, but it fell out otherwise. Every moment I fancied I heard him, but when the clocks struck midday he had not come. I know not why, but I had a kind of foreboding that he had had the mistaken inspiration of going straight to Madame Avenel's before he returned to the castle. As soon as this idea had fairly taken possession of my mind I went out without so much as summoning Bruscamille, upsetting everything that stood in my way and thinking how dangerous it would be for him if I came late, for he was in the dark as to what had happened, and if he were not warned he might plunge his head into a terrible wasps' nest.

But by the time I got to the Place Bellecourt, the mischief was done. My cousin's horse was at the ex-comptroller's door, and I thought I could perceive him from the street standing up in the middle of the *salon*.

I knocked, and Flipote opened the door to me. I put some plain questions to her.

"Is La Tour here?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis."

"How long has he been here?"

"Only about two or three minutes."

"How was he received?"

"Very badly."

"Show me in."

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis."

If ever it was time for me to appear, it was then. Chaos reigned, the confusion was complete, and disorder held full sway. Madame Avenel, with fury in her eyes and feverish eagerness in her voice, was just finishing, at the moment when I entered, a little speech, in which it seemed she had not spared La Tour, for he stammered:

"Really, madam, I do not know how I can have deserved . . ."

"I repeat, sir, that you are an impudent fellow."

"I?" cried La Tour.

"How, sir!" said old Monsieur Avenel, coming forward in his turn, and investing himself, as far as he could, with his former dignity as President of Accompts. "Can it be that I see you here?"

"Certainly . . . I am no one else."

"And you dare to show yourself before us again?"

"I supposed I might . . ."

"After what passed last night . . .?"

"What passed last night?"

"Must I," said Madame Avenel, blushing to the roots of her hair, "must I remind you?"

"Allow me . . ."

I was responsible for this strange and awkward posture of affairs; and it was my duty to simplify it, and explain it if I could. I made a sign to La Tour to hold his tongue; I besought Monsieur Avenel, who was rolling his eyes, to restrain himself; and, addressing his wife, I said, without ceasing to enforce by my glances an inner meaning that my words would otherwise have lacked:

"Madame, have you not tried my cousin sufficiently? You make a pastime of putting poor La Tour to the torture, but such a pastime should have its bounds. I know that he met you last night."

"Eh?" said La Tour.

"Silence, I beg. I was saying, madam, that he met you last night. Well, I know every particular of the meeting, for he has told me everything."

"Everything!" said Madame Avenel, who knew not where to look.

"Everything . . . and, in honour and conscience, it seems that you should not be severe towards him. You do not like him—the more the pity—but it cannot be helped. You feared he would not be suitable for your daughter; well, that I can understand, and last night you proved that you hate him in a way . . . that surprised me exceedingly . . . nothing could be more complete. Besides, after the

severities he has endured, the humiliations you have heaped upon him, you went to Monsieur Avenel, and so exaggerated my cousin's supposed misdeed to him, that your husband went over to your side with arms and baggage ; and now he, too, is ranged against my cousin. I know, Madame, that he was wrong, having recognised you . . ."

"He had recognised you," said Monsieur Avenel to his wife.

"Sir!" said she, interrupting.

"Allow me to conclude, Madame. He had, as I say, recognized you and he was wrong to reproach you too bitterly with your opposition to his schemes of happiness ; he made remarks to you of which he repents, he overstepped the bounds of respect in dealing with you, and he is heartily sorry. Well, his remorse is the excuse for his misdeed ; and since he has come after so many rebuffs to his *amour propre* and his heart, and shows himself humble, repentant and resigned, you ought to consider his conduct as a fresh proof of his affection for your daughter. Were I in your place, I would reward his unselfishness by uniting him to the charming object of his love, and I would summon the notary at once and have the contract signed."

In spite of the confusedness of my utterances, worthy Monsieur Avenel seemed full of admiration of them and exclaimed :

"Could anything be clearer ! Our good Roquelaure

speaks like a book, and he is the man to settle a difficulty. I have known few lawyers express themselves so well . . . what wonderful tale had you made up for me ?" he continued turning to his wife. "To hear you, I might have thought . . . I might have suspected . . . but that is what it is when you do not like people, nothing but injustice . . . I was quite sure that our excellent La Tour would never have thought . . ."

Ere he had finished speaking, the ex-comptroller stretched out his hand to La Tour, who responded to his cordiality by stammering out ; "Certainly I should never have thought . . ."

While this was passing between the pair, Madame Avenel had led me aside, and said :

"You have spoiled everything, Monsieur de Roquelaure."

"On the contrary, everything is for the best."

"No ; for you evidently know nothing . . ."

"Yes ; for I know all."

"You force upon me an avowal which fills me with shame," whispered the lady, hiding her face. "This marriage would be a crime."

"I understand you perfectly, and you shall understand me as plainly. You told me last night never to come into your presence again."

"I told—you—that ?"

"You told me. But I found courage to return to save my cousin from the results of a mistake for

which I am responsible, to save you from your own imprudence and from the suspicions that your indiscreet frankness had already aroused in your husband, and lastly to bring you back this bunch of ribbons which I do not desire to keep—against your will.”

“Hide the ribbons. Monsieur, we are observed.”

I had not to be told twice. La Tour, overwhelmed by M. Avenel's questions, to which he had nothing to reply, was advancing towards me, meaning no doubt to beg me to come to his aid.

M. Avenel had also approached us, and said, with a hearty laugh :

“What are you two doing? You look as if you were conspiring.”

“I was but completing my plea for my cousin,” I answered indifferently.

“And has my wife renounced her prejudices at last?”

“Oh, quite,” she answered.

“That is admirable . . . And the marriage?”

“I have no longer any reason to oppose it,” murmured Madame Avenel, and she cast a glance furtively at her daughter's *fiancé*.

My cousin's union with Mademoiselle Avenel did, in fact, take place a week afterwards; and we remained two months longer at Lyons, detained by the rites and ceremonies of the honeymoon. At Paris it was scarcely known that La Tour was

married. And the most part of those who heard of it only knew it when the marriage was ancient history, and nothing more; for at the end of a year, to the great grief of her husband, the young wife died of some disease that baffled explanation, and when my cousin returned to the capital he was a widower.

During the two months that I have just mentioned, I maintained a close reserve with Madame Avenel, and could perceive that she was extremely grateful to me for doing so. I observed her persistently, and studied her constantly, and thus came to understand that she had conceived for my cousin one of those silent passions that sometimes perturb a woman's life and are the more violent in proportion as they are repressed. This discovery enlightened me as to the mysteries of the night in the coppice, and her self-control in her relations with me after the marriage of her daughter doubled the esteem and affection I felt for her.

La Tour continued to be much enamoured of Lucile; but our business compelled us to proceed to Guyenne. We made arrangements to continue our journey. At first he thought of taking his wife with him. Unfortunately, her health had begun to fail, and the doctors—though they scouted the notion even of a remote danger—declared that the fatigues of the road would be harmful to the young invalid.

So we bade farewell to the Avenel family, and La Tour, reverting by order of the faculty to the condition of a bachelor, left his wife, promising to make his absence as short as possible

These farewells were as seemly as they were tender, and occupied only an hour and a half. It was not too long. I, at least, do not think the time was excessive.

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CHAPTER XVII'

A halt at Montauban—Collignon—His portrait—A merry fellow on his death-bed—A Doctor like Dr. Mathielmus—The priest—The last offices of the Church—A penitent's obedience—The glass of wine—A precept of the gospel—An unexpected cure—We resume our journey—The noise in the mountains—A conflagration—Unwilling peasants—The old father—The ladder—The bridal pair—The broken leg—Isolation—I am taken for the devil—Hospitality—Alone with the bride.

On my arrival at Montauban, I heard a piece of bad news. I was told that a certain Collignon, a worthy fellow whom I had not seen for ten years, was *in extremis*. He was a kind of attorney, thoroughly acquainted with legal usage, and could give very judicious opinions such as sometimes prevented the commencement of a lawsuit and saved the expense of consulting a counsel. He had been of great service to me in various differences that arose between my mother and me after the death of my father the marshal. His great merit was that he was a peacemaker. I still remembered with what adroitness he had then settled the affairs of my father's estate, and I owed it to him that my interests had been well defended and my patrimony properly secured.

Collignon was a merry, hearty fellow, and his person deserves a description. He was of peasant origin, of an even humour, a man of middle stature, with a red or rather scarlet face, curly hair, hirsute hands and a wart upon the nose. He resembled the heads of honest Flemish drinkers that the Dutch painters excel in depicting in a brown and smoky atmosphere. I could still see him, by the aid of memory, as I had seen him at Paris when he came to bring me the weighty bundle of documents containing my claims, with his little flattened white collar, his battered hat with the well-thumbed brim, his grey knitted stockings, his well-glossed and shining breeches, and his cuffs turned back on the sleeves of his doublet. Being at Montauban and knowing he was so ill, I would not defer the visit, to which I felt myself obliged, by a single day, and I hastened to his house.

When I arrived they told me that Collignon had asked for the last services of the Church, and that the priest had been sent for.

"Then I cannot come in, can I?" I asked of his wife, who had opened the door for me, and whom I recognised, for she had formerly been his house-keeper.

"Oh yes, Monsieur le Marquis," she replied. "My husband knows that it is all up with him; but he is not the man to lose heart for such a trifle. Oh, you will see a merry death-bed!"

I followed the good woman, and we found Collignon almost in a sitting posture. He had all the appearance of a man who has not long to live. His pale and sunken cheeks, his hollow eyes and yellow skin were not hopeful symptoms.

"Well, my good friend," I said to him in the hearty tone a man uses with the sick when he seeks to reassure them; "so you are ill?"

"Alas! my kind Monsieur de Roquelaure," answered Collignon feebly, yet with a slight smile; "I do not know how I stand, but there is a gentleman . . ."

And as he said the words he pointed to a man in black, who was seated at the bottom of the bed.

"There is a gentleman who stood out several of his colleagues that I have a mortal illness, and who, I think, will let me die to prove his assertion."

"Pay no attention to what the patient says," cried the man in black, whose grotesque appearance reminded me of Doctor Mathielmus; "he jests at everything, even the most serious subjects."

"He presumes to smile at his doctor," said I, smiling myself, "and that's unpardonable! But I hope, sir, you will pardon him his little shortcomings and that you have treated him with all the care you would have given him if he had professed for your honourable profession all the veneration it so thoroughly deserves."

"Oh, sir! I may well say that I have exhausted

all the treasures of science upon him. Drastic purgations, plentiful bleeding, rigid diet—I have tried them all and nothing has succeeded."

"Do you not fear, sir," I ventured to say with all imaginable tact, "do you not fear that this method may have injured your patient?"

"What method?" asked the doctor.

"Why, the method of lowering him . . . which must have already weakened him as much as need be."

"Sir, that is just where you are wrong," replied the medico with acerbity, for he was surprised at my boldness. "Far from being weak, the patient is too vigorous."

"Oh! that's a strange statement."

"It is the exact truth. Monsieur Collignon is too strong, and that is what makes the cure so difficult."

"But he looks very pale . . .

"It is right that he should."

"He appears exhausted."

"That is the nature of his complaint."

"Well, I will say no more," I replied in a penitent tone. "I have not studied medicine."

"So much is evident," muttered the Hippocrates of Montauban, who evidently took offence at my reflections.

"I have a notion," said Collignon, interrupting us, "that if I had a good meal and a good bottle of sound wine . . ."

"What's that?" cried the doctor. "Wine is your worst enemy."

"Let us say no more about it," said Collignon.

A few minutes afterwards the doctor withdrew, and Collignon, collecting himself, spoke to me of the past, congratulated me on my promotion, said a few words about my mother, and again collapsed, after a roar of laughter at something which I recalled to his recollection. I bitterly regretted being the cause of this seeming relapse, and was about assisting him as I could when the vicar of the neighbouring parish was shown in.

"I ask your pardon," said Collignon, "but I have always meant to die like a good Christian, and this holy man has brought the recipe for it. I shall only want a quarter of an hour, and then I shall be at your service again."

I withdrew and left the priest with him. When the quarter of an hour was up and the priest gone I went to the invalid with his good wife and asked him how he felt.

"Better," said he; "the priest said some admirable things . . . and I mean to follow all his instructions to the letter . . . Gertrude, go and fetch me a big glass of wine."

"What! a glass of wine! Remember what the doctor told you only yesterday . . . quiet, regimen, and perfect abstinence."

"And what makes you so sure, Madame Gertrude,

that I ask for this glass of wine from gluttony? Come, come now."

He signed to Gertrude to obey him. And what end would have been served by refusing the invalid the satisfaction of his harmless desire? If his hour had come, compliance would not hurt him; and, in any case, it was better to give him this slight alleviation. Besides, I think that the moribund have a kind of second sight, which enables them to select among all the remedies that are offered to them the one which will succour them best.

I almost believed in Collignon's strange prompting, for he seemed to be quite serious about it. I daresay after all it was but a little passing fancy of his appetite, easily to be understood in a hearty fellow who had never been an enemy of the vine. However that may be, Gertrude did his bidding without overmuch todo, and soon returned with the glass of liquor on a plate. Collignon took it with comical gravity and emptied it at one draught.

I said no word, for, as he was given up, it interested me to observe the upshot of his experiment. The old woman cried, "God-a-mercy! what are you about?"

"I have obeyed my confessor," Collignon answered in a stronger voice. "He told me that at the gate of eternity we ought to pardon all that have injured us. Well, if I am to believe the doctor, wine was my worst enemy . . . and we have been reconciled."

It was a sharp saying, especially in the mouth of a dying man, and we could but laugh with him. The most singular thing about the whole affair was that he felt much better that evening, and on the following day we learned that he was out of all danger. The doctor, who was present, as were others, at this singular cure, was only told afterwards about the glass of wine ; till he heard of it he had taken all the credit to himself.

After we had made a week's stay at Montauban, we took the road again. But our unforeseen delays were not yet at an end. We had scarcely gone three leagues, and the towers of Lectoure were not yet in sight, when we were aware of a sort of muffled bellowing that assailed our ears from a gorge of the mountain which we were crossing at the slowest pace of our nags. Bruscombille stopped, listened, and then said :

“ Monsieur le Marquis, I am very much mistaken or it is the sound of a great fire.”

At the same instant we saw a countryman running from the steep and narrow path ; he was covered with dust and sweat, and had the frightened look of a man fleeing from an imminent peril and seeking succour.

“ Now, my friend ! ” shouted Bruscombille. “ What is on the other side of that hole in the rocks ? Whence comes all this terrible outcry.”

The countryman spoke so thickly in the speech of

that district that we could barely make out a little of his answer. But we interpreted some dozen words as well as we could, and as the result of our interpretation, we learned that half a league away, behind the hill, lay a town called Saint-Sylvère where two or three houses were in flames. The peasant was running to collect such volunteers as he could, to lend aid.

"We will be the first to help these worthy folk," I cried, as I turned my horse's head. "Come, cousin, let us hasten, and do you, Bruscombille, cease chattering there."

It will be seen that the craze for adventures was now stronger than ever upon us, and we would willingly have played the rôle of the knights errant of romance to the life. Nothing so delighted us as what was odd, strange, and unforeseen. Accidents by the road, extraordinary apparitions, and even attacks by robbers would have been quite to our taste. One of the greatest charms in youth is that it is a season of ceaseless activity, that a man then recks as little of trouble as of distance, and has, so to say, double the life that he has at a later time. Youth is a continual festival, full of hearty laughter and merry songs; it is a headlong torrent that neither the outcry of the old nor the satires of the scornful, nor the meddling of the jealous can check. Weariness, indifference and disgust are unknown. Nothing stays its course, nothing ruffles its happiness, nothing

restrains its self-sacrifice. It is, if you will, a pleasant and diverting malady that we regret in old age. Oh, admirable youth, might not we call thee the fever which is perfect health?

We trotted rapidly between the double wall of stone which the two slopes of a wild and desolate gorge formed around us. As we advanced the uproar became louder and more distinct. We soon perceived, flickering in the air and mingling with the early twilight, unsteady lights that could easily have been mistaken for the reflection of bonfires. At length all doubt was dismissed and the villager's confused words were clearly explained. A glade extended to our right, and at the end of it stood a village composed of some fifty houses, of which about ten had a substantial air. We doubled our speed and a few instants later were witnesses of a terrible disaster. A house, which we were told was that of the lord of the manor's bailiff, and some very large barns, which, as far as we could discern, served for a store for forage and a great number of farm implements seemed to be surrounded by a huge sheaf of flame. It was a magical and dazzling sight, for as yet there was but little smoke, and the whole resembled some vast rustical trophy arranged as an illumination. The roar of the conflagration was like the continued bellowing of wild beasts when upon the approach of winter they are preparing to quit their dens and mountain haunts and descend into the plains.

We stood for a moment motionless in our horror, paralysed by our astonishment. But we were soon recalled to our senses by the voice of humanity, which bade us, as far as God would permit, provide for the safety of the poor victims. We clapped both spurs into our horses and soon dismounted at a short distance from the place where the furious element was working its ravages.

The disorder in Saint-Sylvère was at its height. The main road was full of people, who were weeping and lamenting their lot, striking their breasts and crossing themselves. There was no lack of water, but the very zeal of the poor devils generated a perilous confusion, and in the disorder which everywhere prevailed it had become almost impossible to utilise the means of succour that were at hand.

"Cousin," cried I to La Tour, who had just leaped from his horse, "it is for us to revive the courage of all these troubled folk. Every opportunity is good from which honour and glory may be reaped. This will not be the first time we shall have faced fire. Will you follow me?"

"Like Tobias's dog followed his master. Lead the way."

We left our horses in the charge of Bruscombille, who, for all he was a confidential servant, was our valet still and even our groom upon occasion, and we rushed towards the scene of the disaster. In the centre of a semi-circular row, composed of more

or less ruinous houses, was a cleaner and more substantial building, which had some pretensions to elegance of style and was of recent construction. It might have been called a little château, but, to make the matter clear, a mere hamlet château, and it was easy to perceive that it was inhabited by some one having some authority in the place. Great smoke-jets were issuing from every part of the dwelling, and we noticed one window especially from which at regular intervals shot puffs of thick white vapour, not unlike those which are projected from the touch-hole of a cannon. At the moment when we arrived a crowd of villagers, armed with axes and scythes, were rushing in disorder from the house. It seems they had tried to enter the rooms, but the progress of the flames had terrified them so grievously that they had abandoned their undertaking. I have never seen paler or more distorted visages. Seeing them return, the others shouted questions to them. We heard them answer as they rushed from the spot :

“ We cannot get within.”

“ The doors are on fire.”

“ They are lost.”

We drew up to the throng.

Women with dishevelled hair, ranged in a ring before the half-ruined dwelling, were venting heart-rending cries, and pointing to a window which the flames were just reaching.

"Why are you pointing to that window?" said I to one of the gossips who, like most of the many on-lookers at the terrible scene, shouted loudly but made no move.

"Ah, my fine gentleman," replied the woman in a wailing voice, "it is a curse from Heaven. Only to think that to-day the handsomest youth and the prettiest girl in all this country side were married at Saint-Sylvère. They have been dancing all the evening to the sound of the viol and tambourines, and scarcely have they been back at home a quarter of an hour, escorted in triumph, when this dreadful accident . . ."

"Where are they?" I asked, roughly interrupting her, for the old woman seemed to be abusing the right to answer the question put to her. "Have they been saved?"

"No, my fine gentleman, and that's just the pity of it. That room which you see, where the window has flown to pieces with the heat of the flames, is theirs."

"And they are within?" cried La Tour, giving the gossip a vigorous shake.

"Where the devil else should they be . . . since the marriage-bed is there?"

"A plague upon your chattering tongue that has hindered us so long."

I hurried La Tour forward and we made our way towards the ill-fated house. The burning beams were cracking in all directions, and the ground was thickly

strewn with wreckage. Pitiful cries could be heard from the room which had been pointed out to us. At this moment, I saw a ladder upon the ground, one that had no doubt served for some useless attempt at rescue, and had been left lying in the midst of the road. In an instant I had seized it, dragged it to the house, and propped it against the wall. At the same time, I ordered those around to bring mattresses, and this order was more swiftly executed than I had expected.

"Are you going to attempt that burning tower?" cried my cousin, shuddering.

"Certainly. But your post is here below. Have as many mattresses as possible heaped the one upon the other and leave the rest to me."

"Oh, sir," cried an old man, who dragged himself towards me pale and outworn, "may Heaven bless you! The two unhappy wretches, that you seek to save, are my children; one is my son-in-law, the other my daughter. You are doing what I myself should do, were I not over seventy, but none of the people you see here have dared to do it."

As he spoke thus the old man seemed to designate several peasants, who with a crafty and cunning air, stood around us, forming a kind of useless hedge. They exchanged sly glances among themselves, and whispered:

"That is all very fine for old Jerome. But we want to keep our skins whole."

"It isn't only our skins," said another. "What about our souls? The priest would make a pretty todo to-morrow . . . for though Jerome is a Catholic, Suzanne is . . ."

"That is what it is," added a third, "to make a mock of Holy Church. 'Tis always repaid by a disaster."

"And yet," a third ventured to remark, "'tis a pity. Poor Suzanne is so sweet!"

I had heard such phrases as these while I finished making myself ready, my chief preparation being to rest my ladder with all possible solidity. At length my precautions were completed, and I began ascending, while I could still hear the old father's voice as he said,

"God be with him! God be with him! May Heaven not abandon him!"

When I reached the stonework that supported the window, I stepped upon it and thus speedily gained the room. A more terrifying sight has never impressed my imagination. Red cracks had already appeared in the walls, and flames were already flickering through them, the door had yielded from its hinges and was lying in the dazzling pit of the conflagration. I seemed to be on the verge of a bottomless abyss that threatened to swallow up all who dared to pry into its depths. A torrent of flame was roaring noisily around, and the heat was scarcely to be endured. The bride and bridegroom had been

overwhelmed by the catastrophe at the very moment when their escort had left them alone together, they were not altogether undressed and clung to each other in a wild and desperate embrace. Both were deadly pale, and to see them so calm and still might have made me think them resigned to die. But their calm was in reality only the immobility produced by terror. At sight of a man who had come to excite their courage and possibly save their lives, they raised their heads but in a stupefied, bewildered manner.

I thought they did not understand that there still might be a hope and a chance of safety for them.

"Sir," said I to the bridegroom, "if you are quick, I can answer for your safety."

"Where am I to go?" he asked in a faint voice.

"Go to the window and look; you will see a ladder there."

He uttered a cry of frenzied joy, and advanced to catch up his wife.

"Stay," said I. "You are too weak. You would kill her and yourself together. Do you go down first, and I will follow with this most precious load."

He was in no condition to oppose me. He climbed up to the window, and with a trembling foot tried to find the first step of the ladder. But when he had reached about the middle of the space he had to descend, his senses forsook him, the new fear of finding himself thus poised in air overcame

him, and he fell a distance of about three toises. The wretched man fell in the wrong place and did not rise again ; one of his legs was broken.

I took his place in the descent, clasping the bride in my arms. The poor lad's fall, I must admit, had had its effect with me, and when I peered down and saw him lying on the ground uttering a low cry of pain, I had need of all my composure and presence of mind to avoid losing in an instant the fruit of my boldest efforts. Nay more. I must avow that for a moment I considered the accident as an ill omen in the circumstances, and thought my devotedness would be in vain. This fear, which might have almost benumbed my agility and paralysed my courage, but served in fact to give them a new and decisive impetus. I climbed upon the window-sill and struggled with all my might against the giddiness which threatened to overcome me. I shut my eyes that I might stand the firmer on my legs, and as the young woman had fortunately passed into a complete swoon she did not upset the dexterity of my procedure by any involuntary act of imprudence. Indeed, her head, as it lay back upon my shoulder, formed an excellent counterpoise and aided me to preserve my balance. I felt assured of the stability of the ladder and of my own self-possession, and began to climb slowly down the steps. Once the start was made, the rest would be easy. But it was not till we reached the fourth step in our giddy

descent that I realised we were saved. On a sudden the flames burst into the deserted chamber by the ceiling, floor and walls at once. I felt our frail support shake beneath me, and at one moment we were enveloped in a cloud of sparks and smoke, which for some time concealed us from the sight of all below. I was not perturbed by this, but retained my calm and coolness to the end. When I reached the ground I kicked over the ladder, which fell among the other burning lumber; and I looked around me and was astounded to behold nobody. Then a little woman of the village, having greater boldness no doubt than her fellows, came up to me, led me to a little narrow alley, where the light of the fire did not penetrate, made me a comely reverence, and said:

“Monseigneur, are you looking for your friend? He has taken our good Jerome, who is hurt, upon his back, and is carrying him to his father-in-law's house. The father-in-law is the old man who spoke to you; he has lost his head and recognises no one, fear has so confounded him. It will not be very easy to find shelter for our poor Suzanne.”

“But why?”

“Ah! if you had heard just now what the villagers were saying among themselves! It is the retribution of Heaven! The priest had told us it would be so. These marriages never prosper. And then, when they saw you climb down unmoved amidst the

flames, they cried: 'The devil has come to rescue Suzanne . . . that is how it is . . . only the devil could save her from such peril!'"

"What! the devil?"

"Yes, sir, the devil."

"And they had this absurd idea when they saw me?"

"Yes."

"Am I like him?"

"I cannot say; but . . ."

"But what?"

"They were in doubt while you were within the room. They were sorry for you, for they did not think you could get back. But when you reappeared at the window it was quite different. And it was terrifying; you looked as if you were dancing on the flames."

"No doubt. And so they said, speaking of Suzanne, that only the devil could save her from such a place?"

"Yes."

"And why so?"

"Because, Monseigneur, Suzanne is not of the true religion. She is a *Huguenot*, and they say that brings misfortunes."

"The idiots!" cried I, beside myself with indignation, for I would never allow that religious differences should serve to justify such want of charity. "But, tell me, my child, do you know no place to

which I can carry this unlucky Suzanne, since you call her so, for you see she has swooned completely."

"Bring her to our house . . . that is, to my aunt's house. My aunt has gone to the market at Lectoure and will not be back till to-morrow. . Follow me, but be sure not to make too much noise."

I said no more, but followed the artless child, who offered to be my guide ; and she soon led me into a room of a good size, where were six wooden chairs and a bed, which if it lacked ornament, atoned for the want by its perfect cleanness.

When she had brought me into this room, which was her aunt's, the kindly village girl left me, saying she wished to learn what had befallen Jerome, and that she would tell him his wife was safe. I bade her assure La Tour of my own well-being, and she went out promising to fulfil my order.

I hastened to lay Suzanne upon the bed, and then, when I had struck a light, I had leisure to make the observation that beauty is no exclusive privilege of great towns, but is sometimes to be found in hamlets. Perhaps the pallor which overspread Suzanne's features lent them an inexpressible dignity and distinction ; but be that as it may, I found it difficult to believe that she was a mere country girl, accustomed to coarse work in the fields and the rude labours of the farmhouse. The more I looked at her the more I was struck by the whiteness of her skin, the fineness of her hands, and the rich, soft

quality of her hair. There was in her whole person something noble, stately, and delicate.

A pitiful moan reminded me opportunely that I was not there to waste my time with vagrant thoughts of that kind. Suzanne was in pain. I brought water and moistened her temples, then I opened a little phial of strong salts that I always carried upon me and made her inhale the pungent effluvia of them.

Hereupon Suzanne opened her eyes and gazed around her in a dull and grievous way. I spoke to her, but she did not attend to me. I sought to chafe her hands, which had become cold as marble, but she withdrew them from me gently.

I retired from her.

Then Suzanne began to laugh, but in a melancholy and perturbing fashion. She was sitting, supported by her right hand, and her eyes were fixed upon me, but I easily perceived that she saw nothing clearly. Her gaze was glassy, and, so to say, devoid of animation. The pulsations of her heart, which I could number by the movements of her bosom, became more and more impetuous and hurried. A severe oppression evidently weighed upon her, and the sound of her breathing showed that it was irregular and difficult. But at the end of about a quarter of an hour these symptoms subsided. She slowly descended from the bed, walked several times round the room without addressing a syllable

to me, and then stopped before a mirror that was hung above a trunk made of black wood, and plucked out, one after the other, the two or three flowers which had remained from her wedding array and still adorned her hair. Then she began to unlace the body of her gown, cast aside a gauze kerchief which was knotted over her breast, and sat down to draw off her stockings, which offered some resistance to her weak and sluggish efforts.

I was a mute and astonished spectator of this strange scene, and knew not what to think. As Suzanne removed the discreet veil of her garments, her beauty became more dangerous, and I lost some of my resoluteness. The blood coursed violently in my veins. I would fain have turned my head aside or closed my eyes . . . but I could not.

Suddenly she murmured in her sad but affecting tones :

“Jerome, Jerome, are you not there ?”

I stepped towards her. Her gaze made me shiver. She was smiling to me and beckoning me to approach.

I remained rooted to the spot. She spoke again :

“Jerome, do you love me no longer ?”

My heart seemed to turn cold. I suddenly understood that the poor child was beside her wits. Who will now fail to understand my situation ? In her madness she was continuing the romance she had commenced a few hours before. She no longer remembered the disaster which had just occurred

and her miraculous escape from it. She only recalled that she was married, that the wedding-party had gone, and that the hour had come when the bridal pair utter their inmost secrets to one another. Her desires, her memory, and every faculty of her being were centred in one single sentiment. She only thought of Jerome and of her love for him. Seeing that I did not move, she ran up to me, threw her arms round my neck, and cried :

“ Oh ! I love you so, Jerome ! And shall we not be happy ? What does it matter that we are of different religions, seeing that there is but one God in Heaven, Father of one and the same family, whose blessing extends to all his creatures, howsoever great may be their errors, if they do but adore him in the pure sincerity of faith ? You do not answer me, Jerome. Why do you not embrace me ? Are not all our troubles at an end ? Am I not your wife ? Am I not your own ? ”

The attack was sharp, the alarm sudden, and I thought it necessary to heartily commend myself to the keeping of all the saints. I was not willing to gaze longer upon Suzanne's beauty, and therefore had resource to the most extraordinary movements that can be imagined. Her langorous pallor, her more than inviting *déshabillé*, would have offered temptations too strong for my virtue to resist. Her loveliness was too seductive. I resolved to shun both the sight of it and contact with it. So I raised my

eyes to the ceiling, scarcely touched the ends of her fingers as I made her sit upon an old chair which luckily stood in front of us, and then fixed my gaze in turn upon everything within range of my vision . . . I pushed my own chair a little so that I might not be too close to her and said in the coldest, severest, and most magisterial voice I could command :

“Suzanne, you are mistaken. I am not Jerome. Listen to me.”

It appeared that I had not been cold, severe, and magisterial enough, for she instantly destroyed the result of my virtuous care by quickly bringing her chair close to mine. She rested her elbows on my knees in such a way as to annul all the efforts I had made to resist the impressions she aroused, and answered in so tender a voice that it fevered my brain :

“What is that you have to say to me, *mon ami* ? I am listening.”

CHAPTER XVIII

Sequel to the history of Suzanne—The danger increases—an original struggle—The bed—The temptation of St. Antony—Efforts of virtue—My heroism—I am victorious—Our arrival at Lectoure—I see Suzanne once more in a dream—Serious affairs—What they thought of me at Lectoure—An incident—La Tour wakes me to tell me a tale—Madame de Montal—The sad opinion she has of me—The snare she sets for me—I am indignant—Project of vengeance—A meeting at church—I am troubled to see that my enemy is charming—I breakfast to divert myself—A new expedition—The confessional—Père des Martelles—His disappearance—I take his place—Startling revelations—I hear and remember—The secret discovered—A frightful scandal—An invitation—My reply—La Tour leaves for Lyons—Reflections on devotees—Religious grievances—Words of Charles IX on this—Letters from Paris—An anecdote of the day—A dance at the Comtesse de Luze's—Coulon and his wife's lover—My departure.

I do not remember to have ever been so awkward in my face and movements. Suzanne was so pretty, she had so attractive a manner, her eyes were so sweet, and her lips so prettily parted that I felt incapable of treating her harshly. On the other hand, I would not give way to a temptation which would have made me commit a kind of felony, and the result was that I remained completely inactive, restrained by the fear of making a movement, or even a gesture, of which I must have repented later.

Suzanne repeated her question, and as I made no more response than an effigy in wood, marble, or clay, she directed a most dangerous little grimace of reproach at me, and began to sulk with me.

I withdrew very gently from her, and succeeded, after most laudable efforts, as I can assure you, in putting myself almost out of reach of Suzanne's rebellious invitations. I saw that her eyelids were slowly falling, and that she was assuming the attitude of one in a melancholy meditation, so I rose and wandered hither and thither on the tips of my toes. I wanted to distract my thoughts, and did all I could not to arouse her.

But, alas! the exertions of my virtue did not prevent Suzanne's ideas from continuing their course. All her thoughts were of her husband, she only wanted her husband, and ten pieces of ordnance discharged at once would not have made her listen to reason.

I simply fled from her. She ran in pursuit of me, and a hunt began—a strange and truly extraordinary hunt of a kind in which I was making my first appearance. The usual position was reversed—the quarry had become the huntress.

However, I must in truth avow it, I fled against my will and ran with a careful moderation. Now and then I felt an incredible itch to let myself be caught. I must also say that I lost a great deal of time in looking behind to assure myself what progress Suzanne was making, and when a man thus turns upon his traces—within four walls—it

is very difficult to get very far ahead. The young bride's hand at length rested upon me, and I stopped short.

Evidently I could not escape from her.

"It is very difficult to catch you up," she said in a little tone of vexation. "Where were you going?"

"To meet you, my pretty Suzanne."

"That is strange; I thought you were fleeing from me."

"You see I was not, for here I am, close to you, and we are walking side by side and arm in arm."

"Why should we walk?" she resumed with a gesture of weariness. "Let us sit down here."

We were in front of the bed, and the bed served as our seat. Plainly, it was written that every temptation was to assail me on this one occasion, and when I remember the repeated assaults that I had to resist on that memorable night, I am compelled to assert, fatuity apart, that the seductions with which the united hosts of demons once encompassed Saint Antony, of blessed memory, were then renewed against my puny powers. I call them puny in comparison with the capabilities of that great saint.

Is there in all the world a more dangerous prompter than a bed, of no matter what quality, hard or soft, elegant or rude? The fragrance of a clean white sheet just taken from the linen-cupboard, the peculiar warmth exhaled by the down of the pillow, the irresistible suggestion of repose which draws us to

fall down upon it—are not these mighty attractions, against which we cannot strive with the ordinary weapons of prudence and reason? Is it not a veritable haunt of delights, beside which the garden of Armida would be but a sorry herb-plot? Is it not Capua in miniature? I was Renáud and Hannibal in one . . . I abandoned myself to the charm of this sweet *tête-à-tête*, and, bending over my pretty companion, I allowed myself a theft which it did not even enter into her head to oppose.

Who would suppose it? This rash act saved her, for it inspired me with a wholesome horror of the crime I was about to commit and had already made inception of. I arose, resolved upon a desperate struggle. Should I have won? I cannot say; but Providence came to Suzanne's assistance and spread a salutary mist upon her eyelids which closed them softly and soon brought sleep in its train. When I saw her thus sink to repose, I grew calm, and only thought of her misfortunes. I placed the bed-coverings upon her in such wise as to protect her from cold . . . I became her doctor, her protector, her brother . . . At the cost of what efforts, kind Heavens! . . . But I am averse to thinking more of it, for I should be mad enough to regret what happened, and I am not willing to tarnish one of the best actions of my life by sentiments unworthy of an upright man.

My little village-woman returned in the nick of time, and inquired how Suzanne fared. I did not

tell her the details of the passage she had had with me, but told her enough to put her in possession of the needful information. The poor child could not help crying out when she learned that Suzanne was mad. She implored me not to leave her. To satisfy her I returned to the bed and felt the sick girl's pulse. I am no doctor, but I could form an opinion in those cases in which the instinct of an unlearned man sometimes outweighs all the science of the professors of the craft. My examination relieved me more than I can tell. Suzanne was much agitated, her cheeks were of a fiery red, her breast was palpitating violently and an irregular shivering overran all her limbs. I perceived that she had a fever, and what had just before frightened me so extremely was probably but the passing effect of her delirium. So I reassured Suzanne's little friend. I softly withdrew from the modest retreat, where I had so nearly imperilled my soul, for beyond doubt it was no other than Satan whom I had so valiantly resisted, and I ran to the bailiff's dwelling, where, as the reader will remember, Jerome had been carried.

And here a few words may end this story, which, I will own, seems to have very little kinship with the greater part of those that compose the epopee of my life. The end especially will seem insipid and almost incompatible with the well known leanings of my character. But the like is not to be prevented; and he who should avoid giving the lie,

as it were, now and again to his own character would be more than a man, and I can at least boast I have never had any pretensions to be that.

I stayed with Jerome till day. He was somewhat recovered, and I was assured that his injury would not entail grievous consequences.

At break of day I was upon the road with La Tour on my right hand and Bruscombille ten paces behind me. We soon entered Lectoure, and, strange as it may seem, I did not tell my cousin of my singular *tête-à-tête* with Suzanne. *Vanitas vanitatum!* I was afraid he would laugh at me. So are men made; they boast of an ill^l action, but dare not to avow a good one. The race of men, including the author of these memoirs, is a race of pitiful rogues.

We were too tired to attend to our business on the first day of our arrival. I had myself guided at once to my late father's house, for I had almost forgotten the features of the town. I hastened to plunge into bed, first because I was in great need of repose, and secondly because I was highly pleased to be alone. What a busy night did I pass! How enchanting were my dreams! What an admirable succession of entrancing pictures and marvellous fancies did they present! Once again I saw Suzanne in the costume in which I had left her, her loosened hair flowed in silky ringlets, her eyes were moistly bright with love, her gaze was languorous and entreating. But now it was a dream, and dreams are shameless tricksters. Suzanne was

mad no longer, she was fully mistress of her reason ; she vowed that she loved me—me, for certain—and not Jerome ! So I no longer had reason to be scrupulous. I burst the bonds which had been a noose for my conscience, and no longer exhausted myself in superhuman efforts to stifle my ardours and restrain my transports. Ah ! if it is true, as I have heard asserted at Mademoiselle Scudéry's, that in the air are sylphs who carry the thoughts of lovers, gnomes whose eternal mission it is to bring into communion two souls that understand each other, elves who serve as messengers of love, what a wretched night that was for you, Jérôme ! For though I was leagues away from Saint-Sylvère, I passed three whole hours, if I remember rightly, with your wife . . . My heart beat upon hers, our breath mingled, my glances met hers. And yet all this was so innocent and pure that you have no right even to complain. Besides, the dawn soon came and beat upon my casement with her golden wings, and all vanished . . . The strength of my recollections carries me back to that happy time, and I seem to see unrolled before me the perspective of those too fleeting moments.

Suzanne, my pretty patient, my adorable mad girl, I recognise you, I behold you . . . Alas ! now, as then, you are but a shadow that I cannot grasp, a phantom whose form I may not strive to touch without seeing it melt beneath my hand. I must

think no more of those impossible delights. The suffering of Tantalus was too great, and I do not wish to endure his torments. Adieu, my fair Suzanne, adieu !

* * * * *

So there we were at Lectoure. With the reader's permission we will spare him the tedious details of the lawsuit which had brought my cousin and myself thither. We had to make calculations, get valuations, and settle accounts, and I will relieve him from such a dull excursus. I myself should feel some grief in reverting to certain circumstances which would remind me of a lamentable misunderstanding that arose, I know not how, between my mother and myself. My heart has preserved so bitter a souvenir of those differences and family quarrels that I have ever banished them as much as I could from my memory and my thoughts. Therefore I will only say that the nature of the interests in dispute did not allow of a hurried solution, and that we were obliged to remain prisoners at Lectoure for a whole month. My cousin La Tour, whom I had once known as the wildest fellow upon earth, was much changed since his marriage at Lyons, and made no trouble about accepting this lengthy pause which a grave need imposed upon our relish for pleasures. I on my side showed myself so quiet and moderated a person that the attorneys, bailiffs, provosts and

scriveners with whom we had to deal did me the huge honour of saying to my face that they did not recognize me for the Roquelaure about whom they had heard such terrible tales. Being thus high placed in the opinion of the Gascon authorities, La Tour and I resolved to preserve intact the reputation for innocence which had been so generously improvised for us, and it is the fact that throughout this month, which deserves to be marked in gold upon the calendar, we practised all the public and private virtues with the unshaken composure of men really accustomed to them.

I think I can see the smiles of certain unbelieving folk, and when all is said and done, if I must make the confession, I agree that these unbelieving folk are not altogether in the wrong. I kept in my passion for adventures with a fine, firm hand, 'tis true; I was as staid and demure as my nature would allow; but every force has its limits and the inflammable material within me, in spite of the good intentions that I entertained, were not proof against a spark that chanced to fall upon them treacherously, as it were, and without warning. This happened about the last week of our stay at Lectoure. So I will relate the circumstance, simply, ingeniously, and without reservations. I do but desire that justice be done me; that events bear their share of the blame, and that it be owned if, in spite of my firm resolution, I failed to govern my appetite for little

adventures on this occasion, I was incited by the most extraordinary and most incredible provocation.

One night I had returned an hour or two earlier than my cousin La Tour, and, as I was tired by my comings and goings in the day, I went to bed without awaiting his arrival. Just as I was sinking to sleep I heard steps in the passage and three little knocks upon my door.

I felt very much inclined at first to turn a deaf ear, being thoroughly well inclined for sleep. Besides, it was my intention to undertake a long excursion into the country at the break of day. But my visitor insisted, the door was pushed more vigorously, and gave so loud a sound in response to the shove that I feared, if I kept silence longer, I should throw those in the neighbouring chambers into a keen alarm. A cough, the quality and tone of which were perfectly familiar to me, instructed me opportunely that the applicant was no other than La Tour Roquelaure. As kinship demanded, I felt a regret that I had left him out in the cold so long, and tearing myself from my couch, where the charms of repose had been soothing me for nearly half an hour with the first dreams of a light slumber, I shot out of bed in one of those hideous night attires which, according to my reckoning, would make the handsomest man on earth look like the ugliest monkey imaginable.

It was La Tour in person, and no doubt my

surprise was displayed on my visage, for he said to me at once :

“ I have a most important communication to make to you.”

It was impossible to open the matter more cleverly than was done by my cousin. His mysterious air and the solemn announcement of this unknown subject of his visit were adapted to rouse my interest ; and I felt no inclination to blame him for having robbed me of some minutes of repose, if he brought me store, whether of scandal or anecdotes, which would serve as food for my customary appetite in such matters. Those, who, like me, live in every faculty and fibre of the spirit and the heart, are open to paroxysms of this ardent curiosity, which draws aliment from everything and finds an object in everything. So my effusion of sentiment was quite genuine when I offered my hand to La Tour and said :

“ You are welcome. There are times when one is not sorry to be asleep ; but nothing surpasses a good talk between friends, when it is spicy and well furnished. Come into my room and we will speak together.”

I made myself as comfortable as I could, and La Tour helped me into my dressing-gown. Then I seated myself, he sat in front of me, and I turned a questioning gaze upon him.

“ I am very much mistaken,” I resumed scru-

tinizing him closely, "or you have some bad news to tell me. Well, say it out, what is it?"

La Tour kept silence and did nothing but roll the embroidery of his cloak between his fingers.

"Are you dumb?" I cried, my curiosity wrought to the highest point.

"No, I am not dumb in the least," replied La Tour at length, "and the truth is that I have a great deal to tell you. The difficulty is to know how I am to put it to you. Though a man's tongue be sharp, the matter abundant, and even if eloquence be not lacking, it is sometimes very difficult to speak. That is how it stands now."

"I declare," I replied in stately accents, "that you show yourself as fine as Demosthenes or any ancient orator of them all. But I will hasten to add that if you had unbosomed yourself in the dialect of China or Crim Tartary I should have understood just as well. Descend from those sublime heights, Cousin La Tour, and remember that we are in the middle of Guyenne, an excellent province, where a language is spoken that is not altogether unlike French. Take your stand upon that and continue."

My address had been long enough to give La Tour time to prepare his next sentence. So he kept me no longer in suspense, but said,

"You wish me to be plain. I will do my best; but I am afraid my words may work a change in

your lively humour. I have to tell of a grave matter from which I see no possible issue."

"Oh, I did not think there could be many embarrassing affairs under the face of heaven for a gentleman of honour, who guides himself in all things by the rules of strict loyalty, and whose sword cuts, if need be, the knots that are thought beyond untying . . . Is it a serious difficulty with the Almighty or his Holy Spirit?"

"That would be nothing," murmured La Tour.

"Nothing?"

"Sooner or later, questions of conscience always become clear and reach a solution. But I will not keep you longer on tenter-hooks, so learn, my dear Roquelaure, that you have been insulted."

"When?"

"This very evening."

"Where?"

"At Madame de Montal's."

"Before you?"

"Before me."

"And you did not defend me?"

"My mouth was shut perforce."

"But who dared . . . ?"

"A woman, Madame de Montal herself."

"And you did not find a man to render answerable?"

"Not a single one. I had the only hairy chin in the company, and I had four petticoats round me. I was invested."

"Why, you took a poltroon's part, and laid down your arms."

"No, but I retreated; it was a case of needs must."

"Well, what was the insult?"

"This is how it went. Since you have been at Lectoure, everyone has been eager to give you a good reception. Wherever plays have been given or music hired, Roquelaure has always been put at the head of the list of guests, and Roquelaure has been the hero of all the assemblies and the king of every *fête*."

"Is that surprising?"

"Not at all. But wait."

"Oh, a man needs patience with you! Are you coming to the facts?"

"Yes, I am coming to them. Your triumph has made many jealous and many envious, you will have suspected as much; but what you would never have guessed is that your successes have excited the rage and indignation of a woman to such a point that, intending to invite all the noblest and most elegant people in the province within this week, she has plainly declared that she will except the Marquis de Roquelaure and him alone from the invitations."

"What?"

"It is the same as saying that she has shut the door in your face."

"If I had been cuffed on the cheek I could not

have been more taken aback. I had seen Madame de Montal two or three times, and my relations with her had not gone beyond a few respectful salutations, which were merely civil, not to say conventional. I had no reason either to like her or dislike her, and at the moment I could hardly recall her appearance. However it seemed to me, when I consulted my memory, that she was comely rather than otherwise, and her only fault was that of being passed the commencement of the thirties by about five or six years.

My first impulse was to doubt what La Tour said, and I even expressed this doubt to him in forcible language.

"If you get into a rage," he said, rightly enough, "that will not mend matters; and you would do better to think of averting the danger which threatens your reputation by some stroke of wit. Madame de Montal's extraordinary conduct may get noised abroad, and if I were you I should think about dodging the blow. Do you not agree with me?"

"Oh, yes, you are perfectly right. But, before resolving upon anything, ought I not to learn the causes of this furious hatred? Who is Madame de Montal? You know her very well, and you have seen enough of her in former times to be able to discern her motives. Cannot you give me a rough portrait more or less expressing the woman, now she thus declares herself my enemy?"

"I will do my best," replied La Tour, "and I will sketch her chief qualities for you in a couple of words. Madame de Montal is religious . . ."

"At her age! It is early. They generally wait till they are past forty."

"It seems that she was in a hurry to conclude an alliance with Heaven since she has constantly frequented churches for more than two years, better pleased to hear two masses than one, going to vespers, benediction and compline and kneeling on the stone with great demonstration of humility, repentance and devoutness. For that matter, everyone in Lectoure had foreseen that her life would turn so. The mere word "love" used to enrage her, she would ruthlessly blame the imprudent women who took a delight in inspiring it, decried their attachments and ostentatiously avoided the company of those suspected of having had some hidden amour. But better than that—it is roundly asserted that on the day of her marriage it was the greatest trouble imaginable to get her to bed; she said that she felt very close to her damnation, and if she had consented to the perdition of her body she clung more than ever to the safety of her soul. So she had a *prie-dieu* chair placed about three paces from the fatal couch and remained in it muttering *paters* and *aves* for two or three hours. Her waiting-woman fell to quarrelling in sheer weariness, and the Montal, clad in the light garments suited to the

occasion, was shivering with cold at the end of the passage. At the very instant of her getting into bed the singular idea occurred to her that she must send for her confessor. Someone was bustling off already to go to the priest's lodging, when luckily her mother came and rated her sharply, telling her plainly that she had had no such mummary with her father, and that she expected her daughter to follow her example, which was at least as good as anybody else's. On this the bride seemed to become resigned, but on gazing at the two pillows and seeing her husband duly prepared, her shrieks and takings began anew. At length her old Norman nurse who was there grew tired of this display, seized her by the waist and laid her at full length on the bed saying: "What, my jewel, what's the matter? No such need for outcry when we go to kiss the relic of good Saint Nicholas. Why, it's part of religion, Mam'zelle, that is!' And at last they were shut in together; the rest was in the hands of Providence. Madame de Montal has shown herself worthy of this glorious precedent, and is considered throughout the countryside a most virtuous woman."

"H'm, h'm, this grows very serious."

"So to-night," continued La Tour, "you became one of the subjects of the conversation. Mention was made of our approaching departure and of the supper which Madame de Montal is to give next Saturday. Seated in a circle were Madame d'Amédis, daughter

of Préau, the captain of the Mousquetaires, the pretty Baroness de Bérerville and the wife of that idiot De Garaube, who was lately indebted to you for a tweak of the nose. Someone had just asked who was to dance the first *parane* with Madame de Montal, and Madame d'Amégis, meaning to do me an honour, said it should be I. I thanked her for her preference and begged Madame de Montal to confirm my hope She replied that she was most sorry, but had already given a promise. 'To whom?' I immediately inquired. 'Guess,' said she to me, 'it is one of your friends.' "

"I need hardly tell you that I named you, Roque-laure, at once And thereupon Madame de Montal exclaimed, while she carelessly played with her fan, 'Oh, no indeed, for in order to dance with me he would have to come here, and I do not intend that he shall set foot in my house.' "

"What impudence!" cried I, in a perfect transport of indignation. "What did the other women say to it?"

"Madame d'Amégis exclaimed mightily upon it"

"That is good."

"The Baroness declared that without you the evening would be as dull as ditchwater."

"So! I still have friends."

"As for the little De Garaude, she vowed your absence would have an excellent effect."

"She has taken her husband's tweaked nose to heart. Another time I will pull his ears. But did not the Montal give her reasons?"

"Of course. She took a queenly air, and declared that the name of Roquelaure would sound amiss in a place where the diversions of good company should never make the sacred principles of religion disrespected, and that she would never allow beneath her roof a man who only shone at the Court of France by his triumphs with the frivolous, and his scandalous adventures. Then, as Madame d'Amégis pressed her to give an account of your misdeeds, she murmured the names of Mesdames de Lavernay, d'Alibon and de Guéménée, and this proves at any rate that the practice of religion does not so absorb her time but that she can now and then study the pretty tales of Saint-Germain and Paris. I defended you with all my might . . . I even took the responsibility for your whole career on my shoulders, and solemnly announced that, if such an insulting exclusion were made, I should consider it applied to me as well as to you, declaring it was true that we shared our pleasures and troubles, our money and even our mistresses."

"You said that?" I cried in a transport of delight.

"Indeed I did, and the more mistaken was I, for the last expression spoiled the whole effect of it. Our mistresses! Those four syllables were warranty for a thorough swoon to Madame de Montal, and yet we got off with half a faint. It was not much to com-

plain of. When she recovered the use of her faculties, she asked my pardon for a weakness which it had not lain in her power to overcome. And she made an appeal to my generosity by which she hoped to work on my discretion, so that I should say nothing at all about it. I promised out of politeness, but to prove that I did not think the promise in any way binding, I have hurried here at the top of my speed to tell you the good opinion the lady has formed of you."

I will own I was altogether dumbfounded by the singular compliment which La Tour had thus hurled at my head, and it took me several minutes to get back my self-possession. Never had such an affront been offered to me, and at that moment I would have given a good three-quarters of my patrimony to see some stupid and displeasing face before me, on which I could reasonably inflict a good cuff. I would have called any man out, no matter who he were; anything would have pleased me if I might have hacked and hewn and so rid myself of my boiling rage, on the first foe I could find. Unfortunately the time was not suited to an achievement of this sort. It was past midnight, and a country town at that hour is more dead and deserted than a cemetery. And under my eyes I had only my cousin La Tour, who, in all conscience, had not deserved to have my sword passed through him. So I was obliged to choke down my rage and swallow my wrath. All I did was to growl between my teeth :

"Madame de Montal shall pay me for this."

"What are you going to do?" asked La Tour.

"I don't know."

"The smile you have put on betokens that you want to take revenge."

"Perhaps."

"It would be a very shameful thing."

"Why so?"

"Because a woman enveloped in weakness is a less likely subject to attack and conquer than the boldest warrior with shield on arm and lance in rest."

"Has she no brother?"

"He died last year during the war in Flanders."

"A husband?"

"He has been at Constantinople these two months past."

"A lover?"

"She! Madame de Montal! It is plain you do not know her. If you dropped such a remark before her, she would simply scratch your eyes out. If you said it before one of her female friends, the female friend would laugh in your face."

"Really? So she has a very great reputation for virtue."

"A reputation which is almost miraculous."

"And even women are content to do her justice?"

"Where there is neither light nor smoke, how should anyone suspect fire?"

"And what do you think about it?"

"Egad, I think like everybody else."

"Let me look at you. I never thought you so benevolent. You believe in women's virtue now?"

"My poor Roquelaure," said La Tour, pressing my hand with a sorrowful air, "the question proves that sometimes you are liable to lose your memory. You forget . . ."

"What do I forget?"

"That I am a married man."

And may I perish if I had, in fact, remembered it at that moment! His marriage with Lucile Avenel had been so hasty and so unexpected, that I sometimes still thought of La Tour as a bachelor. Certainly he had had but a slight foretaste of conjugal blisses and was only half a husband. His words recalled me to a right appreciation of his position, and I felt respect for his scruples and discretion. But I was far from having the same reasons as my cousin for feeling indulgent, and I delivered a vehement diatribe against prudes in general and Madame de Montal in particular.

It was late. La Tour listened to me at first with a heroism deserving a better reward. But in the long run my eloquence became monotonous, and I saw that he was going to sleep, even while he wished me every kind of success and recommended me, before all things, to act with prudence and care. I roused him to send him to bed, and had not to tell him twice; he quitted me, leaving me the following remarks to digest by way of a farewell speech:

“ You are very wrong to be so angered at a trifle. I told you the tale to make you laugh, and see if between us we could not find out some pretty trick to play off on Madame de Montal, for, in my view, impertinence is more to be contemned than virtue to be praised, and I think she is impertinent to the last degree. But it is none the less true that, as matters stand, it would perhaps be well”

A yawn at length interrupted this long-drawn sentence. I think I could have told that the poor fellow was sleepy a mile off.

“ Go to bed,” said I, and I led him towards his own room. “ To-morrow we will resume the subject where we have left off to-night.”

La Tour slept excellently. As for me, my mind was too busy to admit of my even closing my eyes, and about seven in the morning, feverish with the anger that had taken entire possession of me, I went forth, at haphazard, with no idea whither I wished to direct my steps, and instinctively took the way of Madame de Montal's house.

When I was about two hundred paces from it, I saw her cross the threshold with calm gravity, her head carefully muffled in a brown veil, which, though it evidently set forth claims to an exceeding chastity, yet allowed the face beneath it so far to appear as would gratify an innocent leaning to coquetry. That was the first remark upon which I ventured. I should have ventured upon many more had she not doubled

her pace, which forced me to double mine, and employ all my endeavours for the moment to avoid letting her out of my sight.

They were ringing for the seven o'clock mass. She entered the church.

"This is our exemplary woman beyond a doubt," thought I, turning my gaze up to the heavens. "Her goodness disquiets me, since it does not partake of the lie-abed quality. Well, I will carry this through, and perhaps I shall see what conclusions I must come to."

I entered the church about five minutes after she had reached it, and I looked for her a long while without seeing her. At length, coming to a standstill behind the high altar, I perceived her kneeling upon a *prie Dieu* near one of the largest pillars of the nave, absorbed in a religious meditation. Thus I was able to observe her without fear of being perceived.

My examination, I must admit, was far from encouraging to my hostile projects, and I own I should have much preferred maintaining peace with Madame de Montal, if it had been possible. Her face was noble, her manner impressive, and the fire of her eyes was agreeably tempered by such a misty softness as adds the greatest charm and seductiveness to a woman's glance. Her mouth was inviting, the hue of her lips proclaimed her perfect health, and I have seldom seen so ravishing a grace allied with a stately amplitude and pleasing fulness of figure. And yet I

thought (for prejudice is strong) that all these beauties had not the hall-mark of perfect candour, and that some indefinable charm was lacking in the picture which at a first glance had captivated me. But as these considerations after all were of but slight importance, I thought no more about them and turned all my attention to the stinging affront which I had to avenge on her, since I could call no one to account for it.

A plan of campaign is not to be so quickly devised as one would sometimes desire, and Madame de Montal left the church before I had decided upon anything. I was prudent enough not to follow her, and returned home plunged in thought. La Tour had grown tired of waiting for me, and had gone to table, where I found him merrily doing honour to a dusty bottle of old Cahors wine.

I entered the room with the gloom of Orestes pursued by all the deities of Hades, so that La Tour exclaimed, while he made short work of a wing of a chicken that was flanked by an appetising golden-tinted jelly :

“What a tragic look ! Have you had a disagreeable encounter ? Do you want a second ? Let me finish this mouthful, and I am at your service.”

“You can finish your breakfast without haste,” I replied, seating myself. “It is true I have encountered a person who displeases me, but as for a duel, though I should spend a week seeking one here, I

should not find my opportunity. Men get into veins of ill luck, and I am in one ; I must put up with it."

"Have you seen Madame de Montal ?"

"Yes."

"Have you spoken to her ?"

"What could I have said to her ?"

"Rightly answered. You would have been very much embarrassed."

"Say rather I should have been utterly ridiculous."

"The one implies the other. Where did you see her ?"

"At the church."

"Praying ?"

"Praying."

"You know now I did not mislead you."

"No need to rush to conclusions ; we shall see."

"So I am to think you found some means in your pocket for finding out the lady's real feelings ?"

"Not yet, but it may happen."

"Now, you said that in a way . . . I would wager you have your plan already."

"On my honour, I have not resolved on anything, but this much is certain : I shall follow Madame de Montal up as a good sportsman follows his quarry. I will give her no truce till I have dragged the apology out of her which she owes for the trick she publicly played me."

"You would do better," said La Tour, whom a

good meal had put into a good humour, "to help me finish this bottle of sound Cahors wine, and think no more of the extravagances of that prude."

"I shall think more than ever about them," I replied sharply. "But that will not make me backward in handling my glass. The wine is perfect, you say? Well, pour me a bumper, and I am sure its scent will inspire me."

I took my place opposite La Tour, and helped myself to the other wing of the tender chicken on which he had made a severe assault. I fancy the presiding deity of revenge gibes at a man with an empty stomach, for the more I talked the keener grew my appetite, and the Cahors wine got no quarter from me. Thrice was the cellar searched in my honour. And I had never eaten, drunk and gossiped in such a masterly vein. La Tour regarded me with staring eyes, and finally concluded I must be out of health; he even questioned me about my strange voracity.

"I am laying in provisions," I answered quietly, "against the evening when Madame de Montal gives that modish supper in which I am to have no share."

My appetite had lent a fresh stimulus to La Tour's. We sat nearly three hours at table, and at the end of the time we were both so merrily candid that we told each other, with all the frankness that is begot of wine, whatever was passing in our minds. The remainder of the evening was spent in reviving recollections of our youth and in hearty laughter. When we

had told our beads, by which I mean when our wearied tongues wagged more slowly, we left our places with as fine an air as we could and went to take a turn in the garden. There we discovered that we were utterly run dry, and knew not what more to say. The reason was very simple; each of us had an idea that was making its way amid the fumes of the old Guyenne wine; I was skirmishing in imagination with the fair Madame de Montal, while La Tour, yielding to a sentiment which can hardly be blamed, was ardently desirous of leaving me that he might write to his wife.

My cousin made no scruple about telling me his intention, and I, on my side, answered that I should feel no regret at being left alone, for I could then ponder over the means of setting some trap for my remorseless enemy. A moment later La Tour had ascended to his chamber, and I was abroad in the streets of Lectoure with all the appearance of a gentleman newly risen from table, with a challenging air, my sword ready and cocked, my hat over my ear and the plume of it floating in the wind.

In this trim it was that I arrived for the second time that day in front of the church. Night was falling, and, from outside, I could see the beadle, armed with his halberd, setting the chairs in order, and lighting the lamps in two or three little chapels, which, from a distance, I judged to be quite empty. Why had I taken this direction? Was I under the

promptings of a state of grace ? Rather, were not my intentions too worldly to allow of my entering the hallowed spot ? . . . However, I entered it—but I shall be forgiven when I say that the tempter who seduced me thither had assumed the garments, features and manner of Madame de Montal.

“She again !” you will say.

Yes, Madame de Montal in person had just alighted from her chair, spoken a word to the bearers and entered the church.

I followed her, making no further scruple, but trying to persuade myself in my profane joy that the incident was the will of Heaven.

Such was my conceit ! To fancy Heaven would trouble itself with so silly a business !

My fair and devout lady did not waste her time, as do many of those who have leisure, in useless meanderings. She walked straight towards one of the little chapels which I have mentioned, opened the gate of it, muttered a short prayer before a lifesize portrait of Saint Roch, and then took her place at the confessional.

I perceived that the facts marvellously bore out what was said of Madame de Montal. To mass in the morning, to vespers, no doubt, in the afternoon after dinner, and again to confession in the evening ; no one could have spent the day more devoutly. And this circumstance taught me nothing new, so that I began to acknowledge to myself that after all perhaps

I should have my pains for my trouble, since no man can count religion a crime, when all is said and done, and Madame de Montal was perfectly free to detest me if it pleased her to do so.

My reflections had advanced thus far (and as will be seen there was nothing out of reason in them) when I saw the Prior des Martelles, a worthy man who had formerly been spiritual adviser to my mother, come out of the sacristy and walk to the chapel of Saint Roch. I drew aside a little, without any fixed purpose or definite aim; I was indeed so undecided that I can assert I had never in my life committed myself so thoroughly to the unknown events of chance.

The prior inclined his head towards the orifice of the confessional, and the confession no doubt took its course. But on a sudden, as if the worthy Des Martelles were seized with some sudden indisposition, he rose, appeared to exchange two or three words that had no relation to his holy office with the penitent, and slipped out of the chapel on tiptoe. Madame de Montal did not move.

Then I was prompted by a demoniacal inspiration, and though it would be unjust to accuse me of irreligion, yet I must confess I was so swayed by resentment at the offence inflicted on me the day before, that I yielded to it without great resistance. Two or three minutes had elapsed since the prior had gone out. I walked into the confessional, and not without a certain wild beating of the heart, which at another

time would have warned me of the faultiness of my conduct, I boldly took my place in the seat of the worthy abbé.

Matters went as I expected. The lady, hearing the noise that my movements caused, thought Father des Martelles had come back, and asked in a tone of great emotion :

“ Shall I continue, my father ? ”

This question almost entirely disconcerted me, and it wanted but a very little more to make me lose my head for the time. But I had taken the first step, and it was never consistent with my disposition to recede. Gascon I may be by birth, but I am certainly Breton by mind, and in spite of the old saw, which runs *Errare humanum sed perseverare diabolicum*, I made answer to Madame de Montal, merely disguising the natural sound of my voice :

“ My daughter, continue.”

It was a grave fault in me that I listened to her confession ; to repeat it would be a crime. So I will limit myself to mere indications.

“ My father”

“ Oh ! ”

“ My father”

“ H'm h'm.”

“ My father”

“ Eh, I did not quite hear.”

“”

I was on the point of exclaiming, “ The deuce ! ”

But I restrained myself in time, and did nothing but cough for the third time. I take it that all this coughing was regarded by my penitent as a very promising sign, for her voice grew stronger, her tongue seemed to be readier as she asked me quite calmly for the absolution.

"I cannot give it to you," I replied in a distressed voice.

"What, my father! Am I hopelessly condemned? And must the fires of hell, with which you have so often frightened me"

"Pray be reassured, I have no mind to commit you to eternal perdition, and if you knew the reason that prevents me from absolving you"

"What is it?"

"Oh, the simplest in the world; I am not a priest"

"You, my father?"

"Neither your priest nor your father."

"Who are you, then?"

"A man much more thoroughly damned than you could ever be, a hardened sinner who himself has need of the charitable leniency of his brothers and sisters . . . the Marquis de Roquelaure."

If a strong and opportune emotion had not mingled with the surprise which overcame Madame de Montal upon this startling declaration, she would certainly have shrieked in such wise as to make the windows of the church shiver, and her outcry would not merely

have increased the dangers of the situation, but rendered them irreparable. Happily a kind of paralysis settled on her, under cover of which she was able to collect herself and recall her bewildered senses. My fair penitent showed that she was not the woman to succumb at the first onset, and that the shock had not overwhelmed her. After enduring the opening volley she sought her revenge. So she came forth from the confessional with her eyes ablaze and her cheeks aflame, and stopped in front of me for a moment as if she were taking counsel with herself what she would do. She did not halt there long, but during this little while I was able to discern that she united great prudence with an incredible degree of self-possession, and was mistress of herself in the fullest sense that can be given to the phrase.

I was standing about three paces behind her, and I must frankly avow my attitude was far from being as proud and calm as hers. She turned about, stepped straight up to me, and said to me in tones vibrating, in spite of her efforts to deaden them, with restrained anger :

“Lead me to my chair, Monsieur le Marquis.”

I took her hand and felt it tremble in mine. When we came to the porch I prepared to make her a profound obeisance.

“One word first,” she resumed with a menacing glance. “You are well aware, Monsieur le Marquis, that matters will not stop here. Sacrilege has been

committed, and must be punished. Though you are no priest, there exists too good an understanding between the church and the court for such a scandal to go unrequited. His Lordship the Bishop will have news of you to-morrow."

"It matters not," I answered, completing my obeisance, "your husband will have news of you."

The effect produced by that brief reply can scarcely be expressed. Madame de Montal compressed her lips with an air of fury which cannot easily be conceived, and I can affirm that if her eyes had darted lightning, as they were already darting flashes, I should have been annihilated on the spot. I pretended not to notice this disconcerting display, and withdrew with every sign of profound respect.

My first care, as will be imagined, was to seek La Tour, and to relate the whole matter to him. He thought it a grave business, and took alarm for me. The Bishop, he said, was upon the best terms with Madame de Montal, and it was to be feared the venerable prelate, whose influence at Ann of Austria's court was known to all, might take up the matter in the name of the church and exaggerate my escapade, which then, with the aid of Cardinal Mazarin, might very likely get me into the Bastille. The affectionate interest which His Eminence was good enough to take in me would not have carried the day against so powerful a cabal of enemies, and La Tour considered upon all these grounds, which had at first escaped my

attention, that my most prudent course would be to avoid the contest, seeing that I was in peril of getting the worst of it, and exile myself for a time either at Geneva or in England.

This word "exile" fell very harshly on my ears, and I told La Tour plainly that I should stand my ground and await the result of my adventure.

I accordingly remained.

Two days, and three days passed ; no move was made. At length—who would have guessed such an upshot?—I received a letter from Madame de Montal in which she begged me in the most amiable terms imaginable to accept her invitation to the famous supper on Saturday.

It was a miracle, and it was a triumph ; La Tour could not get over it, and he looked ten different times to see if all these charming phrases of courtesy were really addressed to me—the impertinent Marquis de Roquelaure.

The writing was clear, and doubt was out of the question.

"The day is yours !" cried he, waving my paper trophy above his head.

"It is a good beginning, but the end shall be better still."

"You will accept the invitation ?"

"I shall decline it."

On this point La Tour sought explanations from me which would have proved too lengthy, so I with-



held them from him. But I promised to let him know my plan when I actually carried it out.

"I have not a single word more to say," he made answer, laughing, "for the result has shown that my advice, good as it was, could not hope to compete with your maddest inspirations."

I did not scruple to accept La Tour's compliment, for I thought I had earned it. During an interval of some days after this conversation it might easily have been supposed that hostilities were suspended. But the presumption would have been wrong. The forces were in motion, though there was no sign of it. All the preparations were duly maturing in my head, and on the day which preceded the entertainment, Madame de Montal received the fruits of my meditations in the shape of the following note :

"MADAME—It is I who address you once more, but be reassured ; my pen here plays the part of a herald, bringing to your feet my humble excuses for the necessity in which I shall doubtless be placed of abstaining from presenting myself to you on Saturday. And yet I should have found one of the keenest pleasures of my life in doing so ; but I am not one of those terrible gallants who regard a fair lady's boudoir as a kind of lists where a man enters armed *cap-à-pie* and points his dagger at people's throats. You do not love me, and I know no elixir or philtre which can force inclination. Besides, if I were to confront the redoubtable fire of your glances I fear I should yield

to a weakness with which I should reproach myself as cowardice; for the judgment you have passed upon me obliges me, to my extreme regret, to regard you as my enemy. However, as the choice of arms has been made by you with exemplary moderation, I will hold no combat with you, Madame, but with the weapons of magnanimity and generosity. I surprised your secrets, and perhaps others in my place would try to turn them to account. But my desire is to forget them; I am satisfied with the voluntary reparation which you have accorded me, though it comes somewhat late in the day, and in the future my only care will be to assure you by all the proofs in my power, and chiefly by perfect discretion, that you formed a wrong opinion of him who would have rejoiced to be—much more than you yourself perhaps would have desired—your servant,

“GASTON JEAN BAPTISTE,

“Marquis de Roquelaure.”

In showing this letter to La Tour I indirectly disregarded that pledge of discretion which I had just offered to the lady; but this offence loses all its gravity if it be remembered that my cousin had been the intermediary in the little skirmish between Madame de Montal and myself. So I had to consider him on the occasion less as a mere friend and relative than as a second in a sort of affair of honour. If the sword had been admissible in this

instance, my readers know me well enough to understand that I should not have had recourse to a ruse, and in such a case La Tour would have been my second. In that capacity, I thought, he ought to be made aware of the end of the adventure, seeing that he had, in a manner, held and unravelled the first threads.

I had arranged to quit LECTURE at the very same time that Madame de Montal received my letter. La Tour had now got news from Lyons that his wife's illness had become more serious, and he was seized by such grave anxiety that he immediately set out to rejoin the Avenel family.* I charged him to deliver my compliments by word of mouth to his wife, and gave him a little message, sealed with one mystery, for his mother-in-law. Then, all things being ready, we set out again, he taking the road for Lyons, and I the road for Paris. So he, like myself, failed to make a part of the company at Madame de Montal's, about which I heard some very strange revelations at a later time. It would seem that she did not tell everything even to Father des Martelles.

In this I find the confirmation of a truth which, trite though it be, should always be carefully regarded; I mean that the mask of virtue has never gone out of fashion, and that it is as well to distrust demonstrations of piety. Many people would have been deceived by the godly bearing of Madame de Montal, and would have thought they might stand

surety for her chastity, reckoning it by her apparent religious perfection. Everyone is not so clear-sighted as King Charles IX., to whom M. de la Mole's exactitude in his religious exercises and attendances at church was one day vaunted.

"You do not know M. de la Mole," replied the king to those who were thus belauding Marguerite of Navarre's lover. "The gentleman believes in nothing and honours nothing, he has neither religion nor creed. But he is superstitious, and would think himself damned if he failed on any single day to go to mass, being convinced that the act suffices to atone for all his irregularities. Nothing is easier than to keep account of his debauches; reckon up the number of masses he hears in a day, and you will have the number of his sins."

It was not a bad explanation, especially from the mouth of a prince whom circumstances favoured so little in the matter of judging reasonably about the practice of religion.

Now, if the reader will permit, we will leave on one side the church and its institutions, the pope and his bulls, philosophy and its doubts, matters on which I have no pretensions to knowledge, seeing that I make no claim to the title of sage, or that of theologian, respectable as these are. If I wandered into digressions of this kind, and put myself forward as an Oratorian or a Jansenist, I should be Roquelaure no longer; but in good faith, putting conceit out of the

question, I firmly believe that, while I upon the one hand should lose much, the cause of religion on the other would gain nothing whatever.

I had some reasons to complain, during my visit to Guyenne, of being neglected by my Paris friends. But before I said farewell to my native soil I received two letters which gratified me highly, one from Voiture, the other from Balzac. I devoured them, as may be imagined, like the Hebrews of biblical times, devoured the manna which the Almighty sent to nourish them in the desert.

Voiture's letter was a perfect collection of current anecdotes; it was the history*in miniature of the two months which I had just passed away from Paris, that is to say away from this world. He told me that Mademoiselle de Scudéry was going to give me a fine place in one of her romances, and that I should figure there under a fanciful name of a very high-sounding kind, just as Madame de Tallemant, wife of the Maître des Requêtes was called Théocrite in it, and Madame Pilou Arricidie, Sarazin Polyandre, Madame Cornel Zénocrite, and Pelisson Amilcar. The author of *Cyrus* had adopted the habit of baptising her friends after this fashion. In this ingenious way she gave me to understand that she numbered me among her intimates. He told me also that poor Scarron, as bad a cripple as anybody well could be, was thinking seriously of marrying, a fact which made me suppose that he was not paralysed alike in

all parts of his body ; and that Monsieur de Segrain, a poet whose pleasing verses were enjoying success at court, had just returned to the service of Mademoiselle. He concluded by telling me that at a dance at Madame de la Suze's, a short time before, the following droll passage had occurred to the great astonishment of the company : It was the Chevalier d'Yverdun's turn to dance the figure they call guéridon. This is when the person stands in the middle of the ring ; that is to say, he stood in the centre of the ring of dancers while it turned about first in one direction, and then in the other. The two turns were done, and nothing was left for the chevalier but to re-enter the circle. Then he, being a wild fellow, if there ever was one, went straight up to Madame Coulon, the wife of the counsellor to the Parlement, it being well known that he was very much in love with her, and without giving her time to see what he was about, or call for help, gave her a sounding kiss upon the lips. Any one can imagine the noise that arose on all sides at once ; Coulon got into a passion, Madame stormed and wished to fight upon it.

"What are you so vexed about ?" said the Chevalier d'Yverdun coldly. "Here is a mighty scandal made about a trifle ; I am enamoured of your wife, and have kissed her in your presence . . . a terrible matter, truly ! Would you prefer that I should kiss her behind your back ?"

This dilemma, boldly and clearly stated, wrought

confusion in Coulon's mind. He bade his wife take his arm, and carried her off without answering a word. But, like the Parthians who used to fight as they fled, he discharged a volley at once terrible and harmless from his eyes at the Chevalier d'Yverdun as he went.

The letter of Balzac was written in a different tone, and treated of more serious matters. It informed me that affairs of state were getting into worse and worse confusion, and that the people's dislike of the cardinal was daily taking a more formidable shape. "Come soon," he said, "for whether you be friend or foe, *in* our favour or against us, *pro* or *contra*, you must be on the spot to throw weight into the balance, as the only means whether of making it fall or setting it level again." Balzac was very kind to attribute so much importance to my humble person; but clearly, however the matter stood, I was called on to prove my devotion to the Queen, and this consideration was of great importance in my eyes. It would even have sufficed, I dare say, apart from the adventure with Madame de Montal, to make me take the shortest way to my beloved Paris.

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CHAPTER XIX

A popular rising—An open-air political conversation—The *Te Deum*—Commencement of civil war—Marshal de la Meilleraye—The porter—The blessings of the suffragan of Paris—His speech—His visit to the Palais-Royal—I lose Bruscombille—A witty saying of Bautru—The little abbé's disappointment—A stage—Maître Goinfre and his friend Friquenelle—The people's comedy—Mazarin on the stage—The cardinal's guardian angel—Maître Goinfre's eloquence—The angel's speech—A learned quotation—The devil's horns—Master Michael's Nostradamus' prophecy—A placard—I find Bruscombille again—A glance at lackey's ways—General considerations on this subject.

OTHER surprises awaited me at Paris. I arrived on horseback at the Porte Saint-Antoine, and was startled by a kind of tremour which seemed to be passing over the town with a resemblance to the noise made by the sea waves when the storm-wind first begins to disturb them. Anxiety and fright were discernible on every face. The shutters of the shops were being noisily fastened; people were talking in low tones, and here and there zealots were gesticulating fierily in the midst of little groups, whose attention they could attract without much trouble. Bruscombille, who was following a few paces behind me, listened right and left without understanding what was said.

I asked the first passer who came in my way what was the meaning of these strange disorders. The boor, who thought I was making fun of him, had wit enough to grin in my face in the rudest way possible, and tell me, with a sly air, that I knew a great deal more about it than he did. The fact was, no one could be expected to discover by intuition that I came from a distance, and the poor devil might very well suppose, if he judged by my clothes, which showed my rank, that the information I asked would be superfluous to say the least of it.

So I bore him no grudge for his answer, though it was somewhat wanting in respect, and addressed myself, for better security, to a sergeant of the militia whom I opportunely saw coming down the road, and this man made no difficulty about telling me all the news I wanted to hear. But he accompanied his information with certain comments of the following quality :

" Monseigneur," he said, " so it's a long time since you were in Paris? "

" About three months."

" And where you were, did they get no news of what was going on here? "

" Hardly any."

" Then, my worthy sir, I am no longer surprised at your surprise, for three months in France just at this time are worth six months in Spain and a year in Turkey. When we move, we move fast."

“ Well, what has happened ? ”

“ I am just going to tell you, master officer. But first I should like to know—though perhaps it isn't my business—if you are for the Parlement or for Mazarin.”

“ Assume that I am neither for the one nor the other, and take your ground on that. I have one ear for the Parlement, and the other for the cardinal, and my right ear never tells my left anything disagreeable or harsh that I have heard.”

“ In that case, Monseigneur, I will get to my tale ; but first of all, will you not get off your horse and sit awhile ? I have a little humble retreat close at hand where I could. . . .”

“ My friend, if you keep incessantly interrupting yourself in that way I shall never learn anything. I am very well in the saddle ; you see that my horse is not restive, and I am in a capital place for listening to you. Is that clear ? ”

“ Now we're right. Just imagine, Monseigneur—perhaps I should be right to say master officer—just imagine ; such an itch for edicts there is at court, that a fresh one is sent to the Parlement every day. Oh, the court finds a different name for each one of them ! we must do the court justice. After all, the edicts would not be anything, only at the end of each of them comes a little homily in the shape of a demand for money, with a view to untying the Parisians' purse-strings, and that's an exercise to

which the Parisians seem less and less disposed every day. The Parlement is as talkative as a one-eyed magpie, and as stubborn as a Brittany mule; it retorts the bad reasoning of Monsieur le Cardinal, and turns a deaf ear as much as it can. The president gets in a passion; Monsieur Talon, the advocate-general, says things in the roughest way, and the upshot is a mighty strife of speeches, answers and disputes that the devil himself cannot well make out; and as for me, I may tell you frankly, Monseigneur, that I do not understand one single word."

This was a wandering account, and the explanation was as dark as might be; but from it I gathered part of what I wanted to know, and had no difficulty in understanding that the crisis, for which Balzac's letter had prepared me, had at last reached such a pitch that the effects of it were perhaps beyond being repressed. I used both spurs, and getting guidance from the movement of the crowd, soon arrived at the quays.

It was the month of August, and fine weather. A *Te Deum* had been appointed at Notre Dame in honour of the Prince's victory at Lens, and the French and Swiss guards had been stationed throughout Paris as if to keep order and act as an escort for the royal carriages. But immediately after the ceremony the Saint-Landry wharf had been seized, and the lieutenant of the Queen's guard had proceeded to arrest M. Broussel. It

was said that the same had been done with Messieurs Charton and De Blancmesnil, both court presidents, and the noise the matter made was increased in proportion. I had collected the rumours in haste, almost without making a halt, for I was eager to reach the Palais-Royal, that I might offer my services either to the Queen or to Cardinal Mazarin.

Unfortunately, on my turning aside from the straight road to make a reconnaissance as far as the Notre-Dame bridge, I found it impossible to pass. The populace was sallying forth at a rush, and on all sides furious shouts were to be heard, amidst which I could just distinguish the words "Broussel ! Naples ! London !" — a very evident allusion to what was happening or had just happened in England and Italy.

Bruscambille, when he heard the cry "To arms," was seized by a fit of trembling which he could not conceal so well as no doubt he wished to do. I reassured him to the best of my power, and he told me with a smile that he was not afraid. But his colour kept changing, and his smile would not have disgraced a funeral. As there was no reason why he should display courage I was careful not to reprove him for his feelings. Bruscambille had, at that time, faced no fire but that of the kitchen, and I had already had an opportunity of seeing at Saint-Sylvére that prudence (to use the polite word) was one of his virtues.

The rebellion spread as if by miracle, and soon all

the space between the Pont Notre-Dame and the Pont-aux-Oiseaux was under its influence. Thence it extended to the Pont-Neuf, the Halles and the Rue Saint-Denis.

The disorder was at its highest at the time when I came upon the Pont-Neuf. And then a wave of warlike ardour rose to my head. At a distance I descried the Marshal de la Meilleraye, around whom a shower of stones was falling, and I galloped towards him, drawn sword in my hand.

At the same instant a body of the French Guard succeeded in scattering the rioters, and the Marshal was able to turn in my direction.

"Why, Roquelaure," he said to me, "have you sprung from the ground or fallen from the sky?"

"No matter whence I have come, Marshal, you may always rely on my services. Here I am at your side, and I shall not leave you."

"Thank you, my dear Roquelaure, thank you. Here is a rare to-do! What a hot-headed race are these Parisians!"

"They are shouting loud enough to split their lungs. Is that their style in action? If it is, we shall soon have the better of them."

"Oh," said Monsieur de la Meilleraye in a doubting manner, "you must not be too sure of that. For mere haphazard soldiers, they are not such bad hands; they hold their ground, they look in earnest, and their bearing is stout enough. It would be a

pleasure to have a serious quarrel with such lusty fellows. What a pity that they are not Spaniards ! ”

“ You are right, Marshal. The powder would do better service, and we should draw our blades with better cheer. But look, look, is there not a man in the middle of the crowd there whom they are carrying off on a stretcher ? ”

Monsieur de la Meilleraye turned his gaze in the direction which I had indicated, and raising his hand quickly to cover his eyes, whence I saw a tear fall, he replied :

“ By what unhappy prompting did you bid me look that way ? I it was who, passing near Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois just now. . . . ”

Emotion checked his utterance for an instant ; but he soon resumed :

“ What could I do ? They were threatening me . . . and I defended myself. . . . I fired at random, and this poor fellow, a porter, suffered for the others.”

He added, clenching his fists :

“ Oh, civil war, civil war ! . . . this is what it has brought us to already. Whither will it carry us in the end ? ”

Our little dialogue had lasted too long already, considering the circumstances in which we were ; and now the need of directing his attention elsewhere obliged the Marshal to quit me. But before he went he thanked me for the goodwill I had shown him, and profiting by my request that he would turn my adher-

ence to account, he told me of a post in which I could be very useful to him. He then stationed me at the head of thirty mounted guards, at the entrance of the Quai de la Mégisserie. The stream of malcontents was increasing from minute to minute, and he directed me to check them as much as I could at that point. I had had no experience at all of popular tumults, and now I regretted in my mind my honest defeat at La Marfée, even my discomfiture at Honnecourt, but above all my glorious campaign of Gravelines. As the Marshal de la Meilleraye excellently expressed it: "Why do not these devils of Parisians wear the mountaineer's hat and the Spanish jacket?"

We could not follow the Marshal's instructions out exactly, for the simple reason that we were thirty-one against some thousand of furious folk whose impact made us lose ground a little every moment. We soon found ourselves opposite the Bronze Horse, and at this point I saw an incredibly great crowd of people issue from the Quai des Orfèvres. For the most part they were dirty and ill-clad, and they were thronging around some little abbé and escorting him, while they gave vent to the most unseemly shouts that can be imagined.

I drew nearer, and to my great surprise recognised the suffragan of Paris, walking afoot like an ordinary mortal, robed in his canonicals and scattering benedictions of every kind in all directions, in spite of the

rate at which he walked. The excellent folk received them in a very good spirit, but this did not prevent them from demanding at the same time the withdrawal of the edicts and the release of Broussel with outrageous clamour. It was clear that they did not lose their wits when they recommended themselves to God.

There began to be such a surging one way and another of the throngs, as they moved in contrary directions, that M. de Gondy was obliged to stop; and he made a signal to me that if I did not come to his aid he would very likely get his back broken or be stifled for want of air. I had no thought of turning a deaf ear to his appeal, and hurried towards him. Then the crowd formed itself in a ring about him, and he made them understand by a gesture that if they would be quiet he would speak.

I am bound to say, by the way, that the suffragan, with his short-sighted eyes, which made him look like a man grimacing, his ill-formed body and wretched deportment, had none of the physical qualities which become the orator. Nor had he preserved any of that comeliness of youth which might have given some food to his vanity when he was still only the little Abbé de Busay, or even at the time of our adventure with Madame de Guéménée. But to balance his defects he had unlimited pride and a rare audacity, two blemishes which sometimes do good service in the place of a great many good qualities.

Be that as it may, he raised his voice and began to pour forth the finest sentiments imaginable about the duties of the people and the perils of their banding together. I could scarcely hear anything of what he said, and it seemed that his audience wished to hear no more than I, for they set to work to shout as lustily as they could, and affirmed that they would not lay down their arms unless the Queen consented to free the prisoners. He then perceived that no possible harangue would be of use, considering the state of exasperation to which their minds were wrought, and that his flowers of rhetoric were wasted benefits. So he confined himself to announcing that he was on his way to the Palais-Royal, where he would give the Queen an exact account of what he had seen and a faithful report of what was wanted. This promise quieted the hottest of them, and the suffragan was now able to get clear of the throng, which dispersed with great clamour.

The Marshal, who had returned to us in the meanwhile, wished the suffragan good luck and even desired me to accompany him to the palace, for fear lest some mischance should befall him on the way, and this I did with an escort of a few guards, ordering them to keep at a distance. We had hardly been two minutes making our way towards the Quai du Louvre when I suddenly remembered Bruscombille. I turned about and stared towards all the four points of the compass in turn. Bruscombille was no longer

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to be seen. It seems that the dread of thumps had been stronger in him than the dread of losing his employment, and he had taken flight. I was still laughing over this little escapade of his when I dismounted in the courtyard of the Palais-Royal.

At the top of the grand staircase I found a large number of my friends who affectionately greeted me, and would have led me there and then to the Queen's presence. But I excused myself on the ground of my travelling-dress, adding that M. de Gondy had far more pressing business than mine to transact; and thereupon M. de Bautru, who was at the end of the gallery, close to Anne of Austria's room, allowed himself a trifling encroachment on the duties of the *huissier de service*, and said to Her Majesty, taking his stand on the threshold of the apartment:

"Madame, here is the Suffragan of Paris, who has brought you extreme unction."

I stood aside while M. de Gondy and Anne of Austria held converse, and talked with Guitaut, the captain of the guard, who, though he was then seventy years of age, was still very fresh and of an ardent disposition. Moreover, he had no fixed opinion, and in spite of his complete devotion to the court was one of those who advocated the release of Broussel, seeing that the man, as Guitaut said, was but *conseiller à la grande chambre*, and that it would have been better to lay hands upon the real ringleaders. The arrest of Blancmesnil, the

président aux enquêtes, seemed to him more advantageous and effected upon better grounds. The Marshal de Villeroy, who came up at that moment, interrupted Guitaut in the midst of his absurd argument. He was greatly excited, and had come to announce to the Queen that the hucksters in the markets had got halberds, he knew not how, and muskets besides, so that they were as well armed as the troops.

When M. de Villeroy entered the Queen's apartment, the suffragan quitted it. The abbé's face no longer wore the saintly and smiling expression which plainly appeared on it a few minutes before. His eyes seemed to have shrunk to a yet smaller size, he was very pale, and his very demeanour, in spite of the proud air he assumed, showed anxiety and embarrassment. As he passed he saluted us with an inclination of the head, which was intended for all, and each person accordingly attributed to himself his right share in it. I was not sorry to see him go, and truth to tell I should be puzzled to say why, for he had not then declared himself against the court, and, setting aside some trifling rivalries, I had, at the time, no good reason to bear him ill-will. This proves that the aversion we feel to certain persons is sometimes, as friendship also may be, beyond the scope of explanation by analysis.

The stormy looks of the *abbé* were soon explained.

It seems that in the presence of *Monsieur*, and of Cardinal Mazarin, La Rivière, the Chancellor, and Bautru, Anne of Austria had received his offers of service in a cold manner. These, indeed, were made in a tone that scarcely promoted their acceptance. The little man went away in a rage, and from that time I was convinced, by a sort of sudden divination, that he would spare no pains to avenge the wound to his vanity and self-esteem. My belief was well founded. The same day he went to Miron, one of the comptrollers, and colonel commanding the district of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois. This first step showed how far the suffragan was prepared to go, for it would have been difficult to make a more significant selection. Miron was an ambitious fellow, at the foot of the ladder, one who loved to shout louder than the rest so as to be remarked upon—a vaunting braggart, who assumed an air of importance that was absurd enough. The suffragan's action turned his head; less, indeed, would have sufficed to produce that effect. He promised all that was asked of him, bound himself as was required of him, and made himself responsible for the companies in his quarter when the hour for action had come. At the very time when this plot was being hatched by Miron and Gondy, the provosts of the merchants and aldermen, in accordance with the instructions passed to them from the court, were warning the officers of the trained bands to keep their

arms in good order and their companies ready to march in case of an alarm. These directions were afterwards considered imprudent, seeing that they gave occasion for men, whose hostile purpose must have been well known, to mass themselves in organised bands and turn their weapons against those who had trusted them.

I left the Palais-Royal on foot about four o'clock. My horse would have been a hindrance to me, and I had left him with one of the Queen's grooms. I was eager to be in my own house again and change my garments, for I was literally cloaked with dust, and had all the appearance of a vagabond. I expected, too, that I should thus find Bruscombille again, for the instincts of the lackey in him made him as greedy as he was cowardly, and were certain to have set him on the road to the kitchen. The people now appeared to be quieted, and on my way I did not witness any outbreak which was worthy of remark. These signs of peace held good during the two ensuing hours, for long before nightfall the Marshal de Meilleraye was able to effect his retreat without difficulty, and withdraw his troops from the Pont-Neuf.

It was, however, an ill-assured and patched-up peace. Confidence was destroyed ; I saw the shops were shut upon all hands, and the citizens were standing sentinel in front of their doors.

Before I reached my house, I was moved by

curiosity to draw near to a group which had collected not far from the Hotel Liancourt ; a singular hubbub, mingled with loud roars of laughter, proceeded from this knot of people ; the sorry figure I cut was sufficient guarantee against misadventure, for it was not easy to recognise the Marquis de Roquelaure under the dusty cloak which covered me from neck to heel. The sight I enjoyed at my ease is worth the trouble of a description.

A very thin man, mounted on an unsteady stool, was gesticulating and bawling lustily, assuring those passers, who feigned unwillingness to stop, that what they were going to hear would certainly be better for them than the finest sermon delivered at Notre-Dame between vespers and benediction, and superior to the choicest things said in the Parlement or the assembly of notables against the Domain Edict or the Tariff Edict, two vile inventions of the Superintendent d'Emery. Our mountebank was dressed in a yellow doublet, through which his bones seemed likely to burst every moment, a sort of motley over-jacket in rags, and a pair of stockings, of which one was blue and the other white. He had a conical hat crowned with a green plume draggled by the weather, and, no doubt to vary the epochs to which his attire belonged, a fine pair of peaked shoes. Near beside him, and almost in the gutter, was crouching a little dwarf with a frightened face, red eyes, an imbecile air, and puffed cheeks, who drew diabolical strains from time

to time from an ill-toned trumpet with the object of collecting stragglers and gathering as many hearers as possible around the open-air performer.

These two persons, each very ugly and very repulsive in his respective type, were mounted on a low and broad trestle, above which had been erected a sort of semi-circular amphitheatre, having a rude correspondence in scheme with the half of a Roman circus. It was a collection of small, unsteady timbers, dilapidated ironwork and dirty cardboard, in the style of the auditorium of a theatre, and the resemblance was the greater that some scenes, already hung, suggested that the performance was about to commence. On one of the corners of the scaffolding these impressive words were to be seen, written in chalk :

THE GREAT PERFORMANCE OF

MAÎTRE GOINFRE THE ADVENTURER.

An Entertainment at once Marvellous and Diverting.

Such lavish inducements could not fail in their effect. In less than ten minutes the crowd was so thick that no one could have got out of it without occasioning general disturbance. I stayed still in the corner I had secured for myself, and Master Goinfre, having come down from the eminence of his tripod to the modest level of his theatrical structure, gave two or three shakes of his rattle to warn the spectators that it was time to give him their attention, for he was about to begin.

And this was the style of his commencement, as near as I can recollect :

“ Just a little silence, please gentlemen ; and you, Friquenelle, attention ! ”

It seemed that the horrible little dwarf was called Friquenelle, for on hearing the name he raised his nose in the air, while his eyes goggled in the most displeasing manner ; and thereupon his master gave him a kick that he received with a magnanimity and stoicism worthy of the finest eras of Rome or Athens.

“ Friquenelle,” resumed Maître Goinfre, tapping him on the back, “ tell these gentlemen what we are to offer them, with the tacit permission of the *Parlement de Paris*, of which worthy Father Broussel, who has this day been immured in the back end of a ditch, or in other words in the Bastille, was a member.”

It was the dwarf's turn to speak, if such a word can be used of the action of a monstrosity that grunts like a pig and has the greatest trouble in articulating two or three words so far intelligibly that they convey a suspicion of the meaning of the others.

“ Hear and look ! ” he cried in his quavering and broken voice, like that of a man shivering with extreme cold or old age. “ This that you are going to see is the apparition of Mazarin's good angel, who is visiting him in the interests of his soul and of the good citizens of Paris.”

And Friquenelle drew from a box, in which no doubt

was stowed the travelling equipment of the mountebank, a doll of painted cardboard, which was a passable representation of an angel, as we understand the word in this wicked world; that is to say, it was a kind of round-faced child, with a highly-tinted face and a simple air, with two nameless attachments behind which were intended to pass as wings. A moment later, no doubt by means of a hidden piece of mechanism, the two curtains which concealed the back of the stage were drawn apart and a sight was thus exhibited which was certainly unexpected; the bed of the cardinal-premier and the cardinal himself stretched upon it, not in night attire, but in the vestments of his rank.

The exhibition of the angel had already produced an excellent effect, and he had been received with the respect due to a personage of his kind. But nothing could be compared with the delight which seemed to possess the audience at sight of the ill-dressed doll that represented Mazarin. There were shoutings, hootings, hissings, shovings and stampings without end.

The dwarf now shook the rattle, which he had caught up, and the crowd, having settled to silence, Maître Goinfre, the adventurer, unfolded a placard on which was written, so that any failure of memory might be obviated, the following harangue, of which thousands were in circulation on the following day throughout every quarter of the capital. Maître

Goinfre's delivery was that of all open-air charlatans—loud, pointed and bombastic.

"Good citizens and my friends," said he, pointing to the angel, which he dexterously kept in motion, "do not include this apparition among those which have been vouchsafed to you before, and do not wrong truth so much as to class it with fables. Here you have no capricious fancy, but an amazing miracle vouched by credible witnesses. I would give you their names, only it would be profaning divine things to support them by human testimony. So do not enquire how I come to know, but look, admire, and hold your peace!"

In spite of this last advice, which the sharp-witted crowd rated at what it was worth, that is, as a simple precaution which Maître Goinfre took against the probable scepticism of his hearers, the general satisfaction broke out in noisy demonstration. The clamour only ceased when the mountebank, resuming his declamation, shouted in a shrill falsetto :

"The apparition of the angel!"

The people pressed closer together, and all stared at the same point.

"When the night time," continued Maître Goinfre, "when the night time had compelled Mazarin to wrap himself in the sheets, and so satisfy one half of the people's wishes, and to satisfy those beasts altogether"

The juggler gave the insulting phrase all the sati-

rical meaning it needed to secure its passing without protest. Muffled bursts of laughter were to be heard here and there. . . . The thin man resumed in a triumphant tone :

“And to satisfy the beasts altogether (the people is said to have a hundred heads because it has more sense than a hundred distinguished personages put together), all that was required was that the canopy and curtains of the cardinal's bed should be made of wood, because then it would have seemed that he was on a bier—when he was aroused by a loud noise which he heard in his room ; after which, the curtains having been drawn, the chamber in which he lay appeared to him to be all aflame.”

The persuasions of Maître Goinfre the adventurers' devices here came to the aid of his eloquence. Friquenelle had no doubt pulled a string without being perceived by anybody, and the curtains of the bed were actually drawn, while a candle, placed in the darkest corner of the box, cast an uncertain light in the minister of state's bedroom ; the more charitably disposed of the company could take this, if they chose, for the terrible flames of hell.

“The thing happened,” resumed Maître Goinfre, encouraged by his success, “the thing happened exactly as I show it here. At this amazing sight the poor prelate (at least, the man who ought to be a prelate) was surprised as he never had been in his life before. The fire made him fear the just punish-

ment for the crimes that are expiated by that form of torment, or rather he thought he saw the High Court of Parliament in red robes, and you can guess whether that notion put him into a terror. What increased it was that he heard himself called three times,

“MAZARIN ! MAZARIN !! MAZARIN !!!”

At this stage, Maître Goinfre brought the good angel upon the stage through an opening at the top of the little theatre ; it had been tumbling in his hand for the last ten minutes, and then he bawled out,

“Listen ! This is the most interesting part of it. The cardinal turns his eyes in the direction whence the noise reached him, and he sees a young man of a middling height who speaks to him as follows :

“I, by the grace of God, the King of heaven and earth, a blessed spirit, a soldier of the heavenly hosts, entrusted with the conduct and direction of thy conscience—in a word, I thy guardian angel, having recognised that I gave thee good inspirations in vain, and that, far from profiting by them, thou didst give thy trust far more to the promptings of the evil spirit, I considered (albeit thy fearful crimes have made me abandon the guidance of thy person) that the service of God and my honour were concerned in giving thee this little warning.”

Never had I seen a crowd so attentive and respectful. Little Father André would have been envious of such listeners. Maître Goinfre continued, while he made the angel assume an attitude fitted to the occasion :

"So I warn thee—it is the Divine Messenger still speaking—so I warn thee on behalf of the Almighty, my Master, that if thou dost not change thy life, thou wilt neither avoid those punishments which good people are preparing for thee in this world, nor the chastisement of God in the other world. Not only those requitals which the earthly senate has decreed against thee shall take effect, but also those of the celestial senate. Thou knowest with what affection I speak to thee, and that it is due to no omission of mine that thou art not greater in heaven than on earth. Hadst thou but placed thy trust in my faithful counsels thou wouldst now be the adoration of the people and not their aversion."

At this point repressed admiration flashed forth, and there was loud applause.

"Thou shouldst have been a torch to the church and art but a live coal of hell; thou shouldst have been blest, and thou shalt be accursed. Thy red hat . . ."

And at the word, Maître Goinfre's wand gently touched the Cardinal's cap.

"Thy red hat, the brilliant sign of the pre-eminence thou holdest in the church, will be but a great flaming coal to shrivel thy head, and its four points which ought to serve as the four pillars of the temple of Holy Doctrine, shall but serve, by a horrible transformation, to make thee resemble the devil! Never imagine because thou art so high placed, that thou art beyond the reach of the storm . . ."

Maitre Goinfre brought the broadsheet up close to his eyes, and after some study of the phrase he was about to deliver, he uttered—mispronouncing the words a little—a Latin aphorism to his awe-stricken audience:

“Feriunt summos fulmina montes.”

The horns of the devil and the red hat turned to a burning coal had moved the company strongly, but these four words, which nobody understood, were received with transports of delight that defy description. It seemed to the crowd as if all Maitre Goinfre dared not say, and they themselves dared not express, was contained in the formula, which was no doubt instinct with occult science, the cabala and the hermetic fluid. What Molière a few years later put into the mouth of an honest coarse village woman, simple and unmannerly, is true for all time; “’Tis so fine I don’t understand a word of it.” Therein lies the secret of many admirations.

Charmed with the frenzied delight with which his Latin tag had been received, Maitre Goinfri thought well not to let the enthusiasm he had so cleverly excited subside. The angel raised his white hands in the air, shook his wings, which opened and shut like a pair of folding doors, and, bending towards Mazarin’s bed, addressed the following harangue to the cardinal by way of peroration. It must be remembered that the mountebank was still the angel’s mouthpiece.

"And yet it is still within thy power to change thy destiny. For if thou wilt but follow my counsels, thy robes will no longer be dyed by the blood of the people; they will be red from shame that thou hast done so many evil deeds. No longer will piteous pleasantries be formed upon thy name, which hitherto is but that of a vile purloiner. No longer wilt thou be called *marsouin*, or *mazette* or *masse à rien*. It is a consideration which is worth thy pondering.

"I might give thee much longer instruction, but it would only retard thy conversion by so much the more. And so I will but whisper thee one counsel as a friend:

"BECOME A HERMIT!"

A chorus of voices repeated the charitable advice given by Maître Goinfre to Cardinal Mazarin. Simultaneously the good angel disappeared from view of the company, and was once more packed, with the rest of the travelling show's stock-in-trade, at the bottom of a box. . . . To explain the final movements of his characters the charlatan chanted the following exquisite verses in a hoarse voice :

"At these words the angel fled,
And Mazarin sat up in bed,
Amazed he was and sore afflicted
At being thus of guilt convicted,
As Nostradamus had predicted,
In his last book of prophecy

Which please to scan with your own eye."

I do not know whether this fine poem was of

Maitre Goinfre's own composition, but it had certainly been prepared with a view to favour his trade, for no sooner had he given out the last rhyme than he went round among the honourable company, offering and distributing, for a due consideration, pamphlets containing not only the magnificent address of the guardian angel to the cardinal, but a collection of the most curious prophecies of Master Michael Nostradamus, who had been dead more than a century. At this redoubtable name some grew pale, some crossed themselves devoutly, but the greater number put their hands in their purses; and as some of the purchasers were disposed to commence their perusal on the spot, he said to them:

"Put it in your pockets, my lambs, you will read it better at your leisure at home."

"He is right," said the more prudent.

"Bah," retorted a clerk, a sharp-looking fellow, who seemed to be bolder than the others. "May I not read what I have publicly bought, and seen publicly sold under the noses of the Archers themselves, by Pierre Variquet at Saint-Jean de Latran, at Maucroy's, in the Rue de la Harpe, and at the Widow Coulon's, Rue d'Écosse, at the sign of the 'Three Racks?' Since Morlet slipped through their fingers like a fish, they do not hang folk for such trifles . . . Besides, does it not serve this robber of a Mazarin to attack him?"

Upon this our jolly clerk departed, singing a

popular catch, of which the cardinal was again the much-belaboured hero. Maître Goinfre and his undersized acolyte took advantage of the diversion thus made by the new speaker to withdraw unnoticed, noiselessly. As for me, I slipped aside down the next street, and doubled my pace to make up for lost time if I could. But I was fated to return home late, for incidents, the one stronger than the other, kept my curiosity alive. I was turning the corner of the Rue de Thionville when I saw a man standing close to the wall, very busy with hanging a hand-written paper on it. The man was about forty years old, and seemed little concerned about the severe pains and penalties he incurred by setting up a proclamation addressed to the worthy citizens of the town. I thought the document singular, and had a copy of it made. I give it here in its entirety; it proves that certain people were at that time no better disposed towards the princes than towards His Eminence the Cardinal.

“Messieurs,—You shall take notice that the dispute between the princes is no concern of yours. You know how they have abandoned you in your need and let you be robbed. One of them is weak, cowardly and changeable; the other is ungrateful, knavish and greedy. Neither keeps faith, and both are governed by lawless men. They are on the point of quarrelling over two rogues, Mazarin and La Rivière, whose lackeys they are. Let them go

to it, the cowards! and if they choose to be slaves do not you be the same. Rather unite yourselves, entrust matters to the hands of men of high condition and virtue, so that our kings and princes be no longer led by the nose, but be delivered from the tyranny of favourites, who ruin everything. Farewell!"

And lower was written in big letters:

"DO NOT TEAR ME DOWN IF YOU
ARE AN HONEST FRENCHMAN."

I had laughed in spite of myself at the clowning of Maître Goinfre, though seriously alarmed about the consequences which, in my view, might result from such a disposition in the populace. It was almost midnight when I reached my house, and I own that the prospect of repose was by no means unwelcome at the moment. All my household was astir, as may be imagined, to receive me, and I made them what recompense I could for the delight with which they seemed to welcome me. Only one was absent from the company, and that was Bruscambille. I asked his fellows about him, but no one answered me.

"Has he not returned?" I enquired impatiently.

"Forgive me, Monsieur le Marquis; here I am."

And at the words Bruscambille made his appearance, hanging his head with a repentant air. He had been hiding behind the others, and making him-

self as small as possible. The rascal was ashamed of his behaviour and feared punishment. Though I have never shown favour to cowards, I told him I would spare him the rating he deserved, but that for the future he would do well to harden his courage a little or give up his place to another. He proffered all kinds of excuses, promises, and protestations. But I must avow that this excess of self-abasement and mean-spiritedness did not dispose me in his favour, and I began to foresee that we should not keep company for long. I think he perceived my intentions towards him, and as the position he had was not a bad one, he sought from that day forth to devise means of making his services so important and useful that I should find it impossible to dismiss him.

A later chapter will show how Bruscombille strove to make himself indispensable, and in what direction he displayed the resources of his zeal and devotion. And in the same connection it will be seen that sometimes neither master nor man is altogether wanting in good sense, and that if, in the most part of plays, the latter usually has the advantage, the former sometimes takes his revenge within the four walls of his own house.

CHAPTER XX

The day after the rising—Amorous schemes—The suffragan has plans of his own—General movement of rebellion—My encounter with the militia captain—The matter takes a bad turn—I leave him on the ground—And barely escape being drowned, hung, or having my throat cut—Flight necessary—Saint Jean-en-Grève—Master Eustache Tiquet's hostelry—Madelon—The house besieged—Madelon hides me in her bed—A visit from my pursuers—I am saved—I examine my conscience and reflect seriously—An arrangement—A mystery—Bride, but virgin—Father Tiquet—His wrath against the hucksters of the Halles—The wedding dress—I turn Englishman for the occasion—A free and easy meal—The well-known story of Henry IV.'s entry into Paris

ON the following day everything seemed quiet, and at the risk of neglecting the duties prescribed by etiquette, I took my way, not to the Palais-Royal, where I ought to have made my respects to the cardinal, but towards the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, whither the dainty face of Marielle Corbin attracted me. Anyone who pleases may explain the willing preference I gave to Marielle over her rivals in my memory; perhaps I should not succeed in furnishing the explanation myself. To attribute it to the consequences of a settled resolve would be a mistake I am sure; and yet to regard it as a mere result of chance would be as far from the truth. I *suppose*—

and make good note of the word I use—that in this instance I yielded to the powerful seduction which has drawn the nobles from time to time to the feet of those sharp, merry, informal beauties, the little wives of the Paris citizens, women who let love come as it will, by inspiration, winter and summer alike, and take no pains to study it in the books of La Calprenède or Mademoiselle de Scudéry.

So I started upon an amorous pilgrimage. The air of the provinces had made my head heavy, and my blood thick. But the propitious emanations of the dew of Paris restored the circulation to my veins, and I felt my bosom expand. 'I was coming out of prison, I was beginning to live again, and I was free.

I had chosen the lightest and gayest *déshabillé* that my wardrobe could furnish. But for the light court sword I carried at my side I might have been taken for a Racan shepherd. I was blue, pink, and violet. And as I feared that the night might not have completely quenched the excitement of the previous day, I neither encumbered myself with a chair, which would have retarded me, nor with a servant, who would have made me conspicuous. Besides, Bruscombille usually followed me on my excursions in search of pleasure, and I had resolved, in view of his cowardice, not to employ him when I could manage otherwise.

I made my way in good spirits, following a round-about course, which brought me out by the Hôtel

de Ville; and I indulged in a foretaste of the probable joys of the day, being fully disposed to pass it as blithely as possible. I even reckoned in an aside, as it were, the several visits I should make on the following days, and reflected that the combined influences of them ought to free me completely from the provincial savour I had brought from Gascony. In fact, I was in one of those gay-hearted hours when everything looks fair to a man, and he feels himself so happy that he would refuse to sell a single one of his horses for all the wealth of Peru—very different hours from those in which a man would gladly bestow himself on the devil of his own free will and for nothing.

But is there aught in this world of ours to be relied upon? and as for the devil, were not we at that time burdened with a real devil out of hell, who, after undertaking to martyrize us to death with pin-pricks, had now resolved to settle the matter by halberds and arquebuses? The suffragan was bitterly angered at the scanty favour with which the Queen had received his proposals, and all that night he had been scheming to get the upper hand again; his little brains had furnished him with no plan more wonderful than that of raising a conflagration. His warmest supporters, with the Chevalier de Sévigny at their head, had formed into line for a decisive attack, and it is asserted that d'Argenteuil and de Laigues spent a part of the night in visiting

the officers of the different quarters of Paris, and trying to engage them in the scheme that was afoot, some by vague promises, some by the immediate bait of a sufficient share in the division of the spoils. I need hardly say that I here mean by "spoils" what the winning side would gain in the way of court appointments and marks of favour to be distributed by the new ministry.

Thus the volcano was seething in the darkness, and a fresh eruption was preparing unknown to any of us; on my own account, I can declare with a clean conscience that I had no inkling of what was brewing, and believed that order had been firmly and finally restored. I had been assured that the Queen, upon the report of the facts which M. de la Meilleraye had made to her, had declared her confidence in the future and in her own safety restored. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when I saw that the quays near the Hôtel de Ville were being occupied by a crowd even more menacing than that I had seen the day before, and a company of the archers put to rout by a handful of lads who could scarcely even be called armed. I sought to retreat, for my costume was ill-fitted for such brawls, and in any case it seemed to me that my duty was so plain before me as to make it a crime if I failed in it. My place was at the Palais-Royal, near the Queen, who in these grave circumstances would have need of every one of her servants.

So I set about returning by the Quai de la Mégisserie, which the rebels were only beginning to press into, and to this end I skirted along the building of the Hôtel de Ville ; but fate had decreed that I was not to pass the living wall which surrounded me ; the sight of this same flesh-wall a few days later inspired the wit of a poetaster of the time, who wrote and published the following verses ; they give a picture that is perfectly exact, though not, perhaps, poetical of what I saw :

" He that now stirs abroad will meet
Chains stretched across in every street.
From cellars now the casks they bundle ;
And whatsoe'er on wheels will trundle,
Light cart or heavy waggon, stands
To bar the way ; and in men's hands
You see old firelocks, cleaned and ready,
Oh, our good cits, so firm and steady,
Are hot-baked veterans already.
And at the barricades they rally
As close as slaves sit in a galley.
A mighty clamour spreads around,
While some press on and some give ground.
Here clerks with carpenters unite ;
While bagnio-keepers all show fight.
Here draymen who have left their mugs
And chemists who have left their drugs
With printers form a valiant line.
Tailors and blacksmiths here combine.
Invincible the post-boy shows,
The bookseller to battle goes ;
Beside him, those who urge the wherry
Along the shore, or guide the ferry.
Bailiffs and costermongers, vying,
For victory or death are sighing.

Street-vendors, now no longer crying
'Cakes, nuts, or brandy, oh, who's buying?'
Display as fierce and grim a face
As those who deal in snuff or lace.
The tanner and the saddler come.
Say, shall the chairmen then be dumb?
No! And the lads who mark at rackets
Are out, and lo! with stinking jackets
March those who clean the streets and drains.
The scullion here defies death's pains,
While pedlars brag and schoolboys boast,
And none may count the tameless host!"

I know not what mad mood was upon me, but I now pressed through the crowd, filled with an inexpressible desire to find somepne on whom I might vent my spleen. The excellent spirits I had enjoyed a few minutes before had quite evaporated, leaving nothing but a mortal regret at being forced to forego my pleasant plans. I was out of all patience, and my gait and demeanour betrayed my ill-humour plainly enough.

Chance decreed that I should bump against a worthy fellow, half soldier, half citizen, whom I much suspected of being a captain of the trained bands.

"Can you not walk elsewhere than on me, Master Fop?" he cried with singular impertinence.

"No doubt I can, but I do not intend to," I answered with a disdainful air, properly corresponding to the one he had chosen. "And as you are in my way, draw, sir, if you please."

Others in my place would, perhaps, have stayed

to make sure if this clown was of a good lineage before crossing blades with him ; but I must own I did not show that refinement of feeling, but acted on the tradition I had received from my father the marshal, who was wont to say any man was noble enough to fight if he was not blind in the right eye, nor a cripple, nor one-armed.

Faithful to a maxim the hearty good sense of which cannot be seriously disputed, I drew and began, as it were, to challenge him with my bare blade. He was not backward in responding, and unsheathed a weapon which had every pretension to be called a captain's rapier. I was not frightened at the inequality, but called out to him to put himself on guard, and he parried one or two lunges that I made with more energy than skill ; I was feeling my way and, as it were, trying my ground. After two or three insignificant passes, perceiving the disadvantage my adversary was at from the lack of his cuirass, for his manœuvring constantly left him uncovered, I lunged in earnest and pierced his arm right through. His feelings rather than the severity of his peril made him stagger, and he fell on his knees, extremely alarmed, as far as I could make out, at his loss of blood. However, my thrust had not endangered his life, and as my part was now played, for his comrades vied with each other in coming to his assistance, I thought of beating an honourable and timely retreat through the rearguard of the rabble ; but I had

counted without my hosts; what had just before been difficult was now impossible, and I heard some thirty vigorous voices clearly threatening me with death.

"We must avenge the captain," said some.

"'Tis a fine gentleman," added others. "It would be rare fun to hang him."

"To the gallows!" shouted the crowd, stamping their feet with delight.

"Who talks of gallows?" cried a single voice with a sharp tone that rang in my ears like a sound of dismal whistling. "Where is the rope? Where is Master John William, the executioner? Turn up your sleeves, mates, and to the water with him, take the fop to the water!"

The Seine was so close that it would have been surprising indeed if the idea of throwing me into it had not occurred to them, if merely for the pleasure of seeing a gentleman dabbling in so dark and muddy a current as the river offered around the arches of the bridge. I was in no way surprised at the shouts of joy with which this proposal was received, recognising it as the aptest which had yet been made.

No one will deny that my position was becoming peculiarly difficult, and I saw the moment approaching when I should find myself in the midst of five or six hundred lusty rogues, the cleanest of whom looked no better than a vagabond.

Furthermore, there were red-faced women here

and there among this devilish crew, and their shouts, gestures, and incessant activity contributed not a little to excite fury in the minds of those fanatics. These detestable hags would gladly have cut me in pieces.

However, as I was in no mind to let them have my skin without a fight for it, I turned about, lunging in all directions with a swiftness that astonished them, and joyfully perceived that the fear of getting a thrust made the circle round me wider every moment. As soon as I had a free space for the play of my arms, I endeavoured to get my back to a wall, in order to have all my foes in front of me, and my tactics succeeded so well that when I came to the corner of the Rue Saint-Paul, into which I threw myself without hesitating, I was able to get away at a run, and felt assured that I was now out of all danger. But about a hundred of the more obstinate of them did not mean to allow me to go free ; they followed me up at a distance, with more noise than effort, hoping I should meet some partisan of theirs coming in the opposite direction, who would have better luck or more courage than they and succeed in stopping me. It was not a bad piece of calculation, and I made haste to provide against this fresh peril. As I ran—and that without making much headway, by reason of the many turns I took to put them off the scent—I came to the close of Saint-Jean-en-Grève. Here I cast a glance back at my pursuers, and they

seemed to me too fãr off to be able to discern clearly in which house I sought refuge. At the same instant I perceived a hostelry, of a poor enough appearance truly, but at that moment I contemplated it with interest and delight. A sign in wrought iron hung above the door, showing the legend "Bernard Tiquet, Beds," freed me from all doubt as to the hospitality of the house, and I rushed into it, taking no thought of anything else. . . . I was none too soon.

The entry was very dark, and as I had had the presence of mind to shut the passage-door behind me I had to rub my eyes for about a minute to accustom them to the dimness, which might have made me think for an instant that I had stumbled into a cavern. Happily a light that was shining at the end of the corridor soon illuminated the place.

A girl, not above seventeen or eighteen years old, fair as the dawn, but lively as an elf, appeared on the threshold of a door which was opened in the nick of time, and exclaimed with that siren's voice which the poets tell us partakes both of music and poetry,

"What can I do for you, Monseigneur?"

"My fair child, you see before you a man who owes his life to the nimbleness of his legs, and who has no more breath left in him."

"What can I do? . . . Tell me."

"A small service and yet a great one; hide me."

"Hide you! But why, great Heavens!"

"A glance into the street will tell you better than

all the explanations I could give: Look and listen. There is the procession that has escorted me royally from the Grève hither."

Some of the sharper-sighted had, as it seemed, discerned into which house I had turned, for threatening groups had already formed around the entrance, and all that withheld some of the more forward spirits from bursting in was the belief that their victim had now walked into a trap and that they were sure of preventing his escape from it. The girl ran to the window, as I bade her, to see if she could understand what the increasing clamour meant. Two or three distinctly uttered cries were enough to convince her of the imminent peril in which I was.

"Holy Virgin," said she, "they mean to kill you!"

"That is my own notion of it."

"Oh, Heaven, and they are quite capable of it. I know some of them. There is Girel the currier, Betholin the cutler, and Viret the beer-seller. They set out this morning saying they would have Mazarin's head. Are you Cardinal Mazarin, sir?" she added simply.

My dear child, do I look like a cardinal?"

"Ah, you are right. I am so frightened . . . I do not know what I am saying. But we must be quick. What can we manage? Which way can we get you out?"

"Do you know the house well?"

"Oh, yes ; it is my father's."

"Are there two ways out ? "

"There is only one."

"Is there a loft—a cellar—a cupboard ? "

"My father has gone out, and I have only one key, the key of my bedroom."

"Oh ! then I understand—you can hardly . . ."

"Why not ? Here is the key."

And as she uttered the last words she turned the gift of the key to its best account by showing me the way. I rushed into the room to which she had led me. At the same instant the shouts of the crowd grew louder, and one of the most brazen-tongued questioned the charming girl, who had already half-effected my rescue.

"Hulloa, Madelon ! hulloa, Bernard Tiquet's daughter ! Did not the runaway turn into your house ? "

I heard Madelon open the window very slowly and answer as tardily as if she had been counting the syllables.

"Whom are you speaking of, sirs ? "

"Of the man who got into the house."

"Into which house ? "

"Why, the devil take it, into yours ! "

"Did anyone come in here ? "

"Oho ! " said another voice in the crowd, "she's playing the innocent. Did not we see him ? "

"I assure you, sirs," replied Madelon, but in less

assured tone, "I assure you, sirs, that you are wrong."

"We mean to see, my fine lass," answered a stentorian speaker. "Our runaway has left the trained band captain for the district of Saint-Jean-en-Grève as good as dead, and he has got to pay for the treat he has had at our expense. Come, open the door, and let us see for ourselves."

"What, you mean . . . ?"

"Oh, only to go over the house. Does the idea of it frighten you?"

"Oh no, but"

"But what? You are afraid. So you are lying, and he is within."

"Yes," they all shouted, "he is within, and she is hiding him."

"Do you see how pale she gets?" said one.

"She is laughing in her sleeve," said another.

"She is fooling us," observed a third; "to work, mates! If the door is not opened, break it down."

"There is no need to break anything," said Madelon, with an air of authority. "I am coming down, and I will let you in myself."

This assurance restored calm among the assailants. Madelon returned to the staircase; but before going down she ran to the room in which I was, and through the half-opened door addressed the following hurried words to me, which I caught on the wing, as it were :

“Get undressed and into bed, stuff your clothes away where you can ; I will answer for the rest.”

This suggestion appeared the more strange to me because the bed was Madelon's own bed, and it was Madelon who ordered me into it. But everyone will understand that I did not pursue my observations on this point at length. The moment was not well timed for reflections of any kind, and plainly the only reasonable course was to obey Madelon blindly and in silence. Without more ado I whipped off doublet, cloak and breeches. I tore off rather than unfastened my ruffles and band, and being thus reduced to the one indispensable garment I made a bundle of the rest and hid it between the upper and lower mattresses of the bed, towards the head. The metamorphosis was accomplished, the scene changed, and Madelon was free to act in all security. Not without a sweet emotion did I raise the sheet which doubtless had more than once come in contact with the mysterious charms of my new protectress, and taking on myself to add a detail to my instructions, I disordered my moustache and hair as became a weary man, and pretended to be sunk in a deep and heavy sleep. I feigned to be breathing very loud ; but reserved a still more brilliant effect for an emergency, when I could snore.

Scarcely were my preparations completed and my mind well wrought to the part I was to play, when Master Bernard Tiquet's hostelry was invaded by a

troop of gaolbirds, struggling who should be first, and shouting to the mere detriment of their lungs. Poor Madelon had as much as she could manage with them, and was scarcely able to make herself heard. But at length she secured attention for the second time.

"Sirs," she said, "my father went to the cloth market this morning, and as our house has been entirely deserted since yesterday's disturbance, our lodgers being afraid to remain in such a dangerous district, all our bedrooms are closed and empty. My father has taken the bunch of keys and . . ."

The man who seemed to have assumed command of the gang interrupted her. "Words enough!" said he. "We will search each story, and if we have been deceived, there will be a swift punishment."

Doubtless Madelon failed to repress some signs of terror, for this brutal fellow now resumed in a gentler tone,

"Well, well, pretty one, are we going to fall in a faint? Tell us the truth, and we will do you no harm. Do you assure us you have no one here?"

"No one," stammered Madelon, "except a traveller who arrived this morning from I know not where; he was very tired and very ill, and I was obliged to give up my room to him, for I had no other to offer him."

"Well," said one of the speakers, more tractable than his companions, "if what she says is true, it

would be a proof that her father has taken the keys with him, and then it would be enough for us to see this traveller and make quite sure he is not our runaway."

"Assuredly, sirs," said Madelon, who rightly judged that assurance was her best policy; "follow me, and I will open my room for you."

"She is a very willing little girl," resumed the man with the loud voice, who had no doubt spent his time in admiring her. "Let five or six remain with me, and do you others form a company of the same number to search every nook and cranny of the house. Our man might have slipped in somewhere without this pretty lass seeing him Forward!"

Those that were the keenest rushed up the staircase, and the band that Madelon was guiding advanced to my door. I heard the hinges creak, and knew that the die was cast. The enemy was in possession.

I gave vent to a deep sigh, and then began to breathe deeply enough to make the windows rattle.

"You see, he is asleep," murmured Madelon.

"As sound as Holophernes the night when Judith cut his head off. It's as true as can be," said the cit with conviction. "Sorry to have put you about, my pretty child. Come, comrades, let's be moving. That is to say, let's stay a little longer, for they may have run him down on the other story."

One of those who had gone up now returned with a discouraged look, hanging his head:

"Nothing, nothing at all," said he. "Yet I would have wagered a hundred casks of brandy against a pinch of snuff that . . ."

"You would have lost, fool," resumed the leader, in the tone of a man of ability. "It is clear that we were wrong. But it does not matter, lads. We won't forget, and we'll keep our eyes open. A court gallant does not slip away like an eel, and we shall meet him sooner or later. The villain will not lose anything that is due to him by waiting."

The blood had begun to rush to my face, and I should have felt a great delight in conferring a certain order of chivalry on this boor by bringing the flat of my sword down across his back. Madelon understood the secret inclination of my mind, as well as the restraint I exercised upon myself to resist it. She cut the scene short, and led her guests out again with a perfect appearance of dignity.

"I am sorry," said she, "that my father is not here. He would certainly have asked you to drink with him."

This indirect fashion of softening stony hearts was crowned with complete success. The brawlers offered all sorts of excuses and protestations, and raised a hymn, as it were, to the glorious and too-long-neglected merits of Father Tiquet.

"And did he take away the cellar key, too?" asked the wag of the band, maliciously.

"You low rascal!" cried the cit, who commanded

by virtue of the strength of his lungs. "Did the Jesuits of Clermont College teach you to answer a young lady's politeness with your stupid foolery? Come, lead the way out, and walk straight. My friends," he continued, addressing his company, "let us return to the Quai de la Grève and the Pont-audouble. We ought to have made our quarters there already. Good-bye, Mademoiselle Tiquet, good-bye."

"Good luck, gentlemen, and *au revoir*."

"Let's be starting, comrades. There's more than one hare in the wood. So let's return to the hunt. Long live Broussel, and down with Mazarin!"

It had been as much as I could do to keep quiet; and no sooner were my pursuers out of the place than I sat up and then jumped out of bed, cursing and swearing right and left, and acting for the nonce like the cowardly braggart to be seen in comedies who, when his adversary is too far off to either see or hear him, insults the foe with futile gestures and innocuous abuse. I think I should have been the first to laugh at my perfectly absurd outbreak if I had not in the bottom of my heart felt a real regret at having played the mean part I had taken. I doubted myself, and asked with a horror which I could not now convey in words as I felt it then, if it was possible that I, Gaston, Marquis de Roquelaure, had acted so from cowardice and lack of spirit? No one but a casuist could have solved my question, for I had always loudly proclaimed that the prudent man and

the poltroon were one and the same, and I should have thought it shameful to modify my views to suit the present circumstances. No subtlety could have saved me from the ugly predicament; indeed, subtleties would only have served to make me ridiculous in my own eyes. I sought in vain, but found no excuse. I did not, indeed, blame myself for evading the fury of the rabble after paying out my opponent in the Place de la Grève. I could understand that one single man might retreat before a whole host; but since I had got into the hostelry the posture of affairs had most seriously changed in my opinion. I was still single-handed, but I had only a handful of shouting bullies at my heels, and an attitude of valour is of itself sufficient sometimes to put such to flight. Now, here was the strict statement of the facts. As a man, I had yielded to numbers; as a soldier, I had shown my heels to a pack of undisciplined ruffians; as a gentleman, I had given way before mere boors. . . . Whence had this sudden access of meekness and calm descended upon me? Who had forced me to keep to the bed? It was a deep, an insoluble enigma. . . .

Till on a sudden the answer of the puzzle flashed upon me.

And the answer was a living one. It bore human shape, and had just reappeared on the threshold of the room, clad in a brown mob-cap and a short skirt.

It was Madelon.

So in an instant the darkness was scattered and all was explained. The cause of the incident, hidden till then, appeared in its perfect simplicity, and the revelation needed no word or sign to complete it, but gradually reconciled me with my conscience, which was thus lulled to tranquillity. Yes, Madelon could alone have exercised that secret, unrecognised influence upon me. I had unwittingly yielded to the power of one of those delicious charms of which we hear in fairy tales, and the reason why I had not leaped from my prison to punish the wretches who had wounded me with insults, was that my prison was a pretty girl's bed; I had taken no formal resolve, I had made no admission to myself, but my firm intention had been to stay with Madelon, as near to her as I could, and as long as I could.

What I have here explained in such lengthy phrases was, in truth, a reflection which occupied perhaps half a minute, just time enough for two bright flashes of Madelon's sweet eyes; I was soon restored to the sentiment of my duty and of good manners by remembering that my lightly-clad condition was somewhat immodest, and that my young hostess's delicacy might take alarm at it. Nothing, indeed, can be more treacherous than that tissue of threads which the Roman ladies used to call a tunic, and which we call a shirt, which flutters, rises, and streams in the wind without rhyme or reason. Madelon, by returning so soon, cut me off from all retreat

but the bed ; so I took refuge in it for the second time, while Madelon, abashed and blushing in her confusion, knew not what to do with her eyes, legs, or voice. My presence in the room was plainly her own doing, and yet she seemed all surprised at what she had done.

“ How is it possible ! ” she cried, “ you are in bed ! ”

“ Does that surprise you ? ”

“ No, but it frightens me. ”

“ But did not you order me there yourself ? ”

“ Yes, of course I did ! ”

“ Tell me, will your father return soon ? ”

“ Oh, if I only feared him . . . ! ”

“ Well, who else has control of you ? I think a father is the only person to whom a daughter is bound to render account of her actions. And if he were to appear here now, all of a sudden, I should tell him word for word just what has happened in his absence. ”

“ It would be an excellent way of getting me beaten, ” said Madelon with a sigh.

“ What, is your father a brute ? Does he care for nobody ? ”

“ There is only one thing he cares for, ” replied the poor girl in a sad voice, which was new to my ears, “ and that is, the sound of money. ”

“ Ah, he’s a miser ! ”

“ Oh, he is kind all the same, ” replied Madelon eagerly ; “ only sometimes it makes him impatient . . .

But do you know no one in the world that must be feared more than a father ? ”

“ Eh ? Who is that ? ”

“ A husband.”

Anyone can understand the amazement which suddenly possessed me, who will remember that Madelon, fresh as a rosebud, and slim and fair as a child, looked at first sight much more like one to be confirmed shortly, than one who had lately been wedded ; however, scanning her more closely, I could discern on her cheeks the pretty down that accompanies puberty, and that tell-tale flame under her drooping eyelids which speaks of the first anxieties of a young heart. For all that, as I threw myself back to scan her better, I cried :

“ You . . . you . . . are married ? ”

“ Certainly I am.”

“ Married . . . really ? ”

Madelon blushed, fingered her apron and stammered :

“ To tell the truth, I don't quite know, Monseigneur.”

“ Oh, come, my little Madelon, here is a puzzle that you must not refuse to explain to me.”

“ How can I explain to you, Monseigneur, what I do not understand ? ”

Such a beginning promised most wonderful revelations. I saw that I must not allow Madelon time to reflect, and instantly resumed :

"Tell me, tell me, Madelon, and I will help you."

"But what do you want me to tell you?"

"The story of your marriage. I am burning to hear it; my poor little girl, so young and so innocent! I wager that they sacrificed you . . ."

"Oh, there!" cried Madelon, her eyes brightening at the last word I uttered. "Claudine, who is a good friend of mine, married a master spurrier, of Orleans, last year, and before she left Paris she told me: 'Take good care they do not sacrifice you!' Who can tell if it has not happened? Perhaps I have been sacrificed. Could not you explain to me what it means, Monseigneur?"

"Oh, yes, but upon one condition; you must tell me how it all happened."

"Ah, you are right . . . of course, I must tell you . . . but, Monseigneur, I do not think it would interest you . . . I shall weary you, I am sure."

"Madelon, Madelon, how much time you waste."

"But it is such a sad story."

"We will contrive to make it merry between us."

"You want to hear it?"

"I must."

Madelon gave vent to a long-drawn sigh and commenced her tale, which took up nearly an hour; here I will but give the gist of it, for the reader has not the same reasons that I had to be patient, and Madelon in fact, either by choice or unwittingly, spun the tale out prodigiously: expansion is no doubt a clumsy

system from the point of view of a well-conceived narrative, but I thought well to encourage her in it to the best of my power. The facts stood thus: and to render them intelligible I shall subtract those lenitive glosses which her filial piety introduced here and there. The story will thus gain in truth more than it loses by bluntness. Bernard Tiquet was an old miser who regarded his daughter's beauty as an additional means of increasing his store of worldly goods, and who, upon a careful calculation, had found no course more prudent than that of bestowing her upon one Nicolas Boutrel, a master ironmonger, who carried on his business about a hundred yards from the Convent of the Hospitalières, close to the Place Royale. Nicolas Boutrel, as far as I could discover, was another brute, who had not only made a large profit by his trade, which he conducted in a dirty shop at the sign of the "Three Hammers," but had fattened his purse with what he drew from another occupation, which enriches all whom it does not lead to the gaol. The ironmonger practised usury, and made loans to his neighbours at a profit of half as much again on the sum he lent. This brought him a fine penny, as will be understood, and it was not surprising that he had become one of the most notable men in the district. The betrothal had been accomplished in a quiet way in the presence of some of Bernard's distant relatives. As for Nicolas, he had not a single relative on earth who had the

right to meddle with his affairs ; inheritances from a large family had fallen in to him one by one, and the only survivor of his kin was a cousin of the age of seventy, eccentric, distrustful, and a drunkard, who lived at Montlhéry in a worm-eaten hut, which the people around regarded as merely a haunt for spiders, though Nicolas felt assured that the old man had hoarded money there. He was anxious about this cousin, and considered, though he did not say as much in public, that he was a long time in getting out of the world ; however, as Nicolas was now above thirty-six years of age and of a robust constitution, he thought it necessary to take a wife ; he came to an agreement with Father Tiquet, and obtained Madelon on the condition that he took her without a dowry. In return he was boarded and lodged. In all these arrangements Madelon was bartered without even being consulted, and one fine morning she was told that she was to be Nicolas Boutrel's wife. . . . Other girls would have begged for delay, or at least exclaimed upon such tyranny. But Madelon was accustomed to obey and said no word, only feeling an inward fear, yet without so much as trying to explain it to herself. She did indeed take the liberty of asking her father if he thought she would be happy . . . Old Bernard's tenderest susceptibility had been appealed to, for he perceived a real advantage for himself and a new source of future gains in the getting his daughter placed with-

out charge; so he told her Nicolas was the man to suit her, and that she would thank him for his fatherly act later. Madelon believed her father's word and consented to all that was wanted, although this great happiness they promised her appeared very doubtful and problematical to herself, in more ways than one. However, she had acquiesced, for though she had no liking for Nicolas Boutrel, yet, to judge by what her father said, that was a trifling consideration, and one she need not trouble herself about at all. She was to trust in God; so the marriage contract was signed, the wedding-day was fixed, and the curé of Saint-Gervais performed the service.

Madelon, when she reached this point in the tale, stopped, not so much to take breath as to repress the secret emotion which her tones betrayed.

"Well?" I asked her, after a rather long silence; "was that long ago?"

"A week; to-day is the twenty-eighth of August, and it was the twentieth."

"You have been married a week! Why, it is quite a pretty experience already! . . . and you have only got me as far as the church! . . . Let us hear what happened next . . ."

"What happened next? But, Monseigneur, nothing happened."

"Madelon, my little Madelon, you mean to keep a part of the story back from me. . . . There was something after that."

"No."

"Yes."

"Think hard."

"It is no use thinking."

"Come . . . pluck up heart . . ."

"All that I can tell you," said she, as if she were searching her recollections, "is that just as we came back from the church, and I was thinking of what Claudine had told me about the pleasure of being alone with a husband for the first time, a letter was brought for my husband, Nicolas Boutrel, which informed him of the death of his cousin at Montlhéry . . . and then . . ."

"Well?"

"Well, Monseigneur . . . Oh, but I cannot go on now!"

And Madelon listened.

"What is it?"

"Hush! Someone is coming."

"Who?"

"My father; I hear his footsteps."

"Father Tiquet!" I muttered, arranging myself as best I could under the sheet. "What the devil has brought him back so soon?"

"Now, listen to me carefully," said Madelon hurriedly.

"I am all attention."

"You must still pretend to be asleep."

"What? Am I condemned to sleep for ever?"

"I beg it of you."

"Well," I said in a tone of resignation, "to vary matters a little I will snore this time."

"I am going to tell my father what I told the others . . . that you are a traveller who is but passing through Paris, so as to explain why you take shelter in a hostelry."

"Admirable! But why not tell him the true story? It is a good one."

"One of two things. Either he would not make head or tale of it, or he would beat me for meddling with politics and admitting people here when he has forbidden it. He is always thinking about thieves."

"I see; I am to count for a traveller."

"You will not betray me?"

"I will echo every word you say."

"But . . . to make him believe the story, you must stay here at least . . . a day or two," she added timidly

"I will stay as long as may be needful to convince him, my pretty Madelon, more especially that I may continue to see you."

She disappeared, the door was closed, and to the sweet intonations of Madelon's voice succeeded an infernal din. It was like the clatter of arms clashed together, or a concert of shrill instruments twanged by the talons of a score of demons. Father Tiquet seemed to make all this noise on his own account,

and from the few words I could catch in his interminable monologue (for Madelon was completely silent) I managed to make out, though with difficulty, that he was not satisfied with his visit to the cloth market. The traders there, to judge by his account, were rogues and thieves, who had conspired to deceive him, and squeeze his money out of him.

"Do you understand," said he to his daughter, "that I had bought this fine cloth coat, to make a show in on your wedding-day, for eighteen crowns, and to-day I wanted to sell it back, and they offered me . . . guess how much?"

I fancied that Madelon made no answer, and no doubt my conjecture was right, for the old man resumed with volubility :

"That's it, now don't listen to me ! . . . lift your eyes to the skies and think of something else while I am talking ! . . . Oh, these little moonies ! . . . It's not to be borne . . . only that I restrain myself !"

"My father, I swear to you . . ." stammered Madelon.

"Well, there's enough of it ; I don't like girls to argue."

"Well, father, they offered you ?"

"A quarter of a pistole ! What do you think of that ?"

Madelon was excused from a reply by the gratification which the venerable author of her days at

once allowed himself by overturning everything in the kitchen. One of the chairs was thrown against the wall, the tongs clanged upon the hearth, and there was a noise as of saucepans disordered on the nails, whence no doubt they were hanging in the most inoffensive attitude possible. The old father, a thorough domestic scourge, was renewing the outrages of Attila in miniature. But on the following day I was able to note that the old man's violence was not so fierce as it seemed; he had a way of oversetting the furniture that did no harm to it. He was a veteran miser, so while he sated his rage upon the things, he made his fury very terrible in appearance, but kept it very prudent and mild in its effects. All his wrath passed off in noise and threats. He banged the doors and put everything awry in the house; then Madelon set the place tidy a second time and there was an end,

Calm succeeds to storm, and peace to war. I thought I heard Father Tiquet and his daughter enter the parlour below and commence a quieter conversation, of which, no doubt, I was the subject, but I could overhear none of it. And in the meanwhile an odd thing happened to me. I had played at going to sleep so much, that I went to sleep in earnest. The dreariness of solitude—it was almost an hour since Madelon had gone downstairs—began to weigh on my eyelids; the fatigues of the day did the rest. I

awoke about eight in the evening. Then, urged by hunger. I pulled a bell, the rope of which was dangling above my bed-head. I naturally expected to see Madelon answer the summons, and I leave you to imagine my disappointment when I saw a dirty old man of short stature, whose jacket shone with greasiness, whose stockings were in holes, whose hair was in disorder for lack of the comb, and whose face, ill-looking enough at a first glance, grew more and more repellent the longer I gazed at it, and made me think of an owl's head. I could not restrain my first exclamation, which was,

"Well? . . . and who are you?"

"Who am I? . . . with your leave, Messire, I am called Bernard Tiquet."

"You! Bernard Tiquet!"

"Do you want to see the entry of my baptism in the parish register?"

"Tiquet! Well, I can't make it out. . . . So you are Madelon's father?"

"So my wife has always told me, sir."

"The poor fool," thought I, "to ask such a thing as that of his wife! Do you know," I continued aloud, "that you have a pretty slip of a daughter, Master Tiquet?"

"Oh, she's so young . . . it's just the prettiness of youth," said my host with a smile which verged on modesty. "But will you give me your name, Monseigneur, so as I may enter it in my every-day book?"

The Civil Authority, as you know, orders us to observe that form under the heaviest penalties."

"Oh, it does not matter, my worthy fellow. You can put down . . ."

I was about to say my name, but a seasonable reflection checked me from doing so. My incognito might assist those plans of which I myself was not fully conscious then, but which certainly were in course of formation in the depths of my mind. So I resumed, after a pause which had but lasted a few seconds :

"You can enter it that you have to-day received into your house the Chevalier Henry Waller of Guernsey—charged by the Parliament of Great Britain with a secret mission in France, a mission which he would have accomplished already but for the terrible uproar in which he was involved this morning ; it forced him to seek a lodging in a place where he could feel secure for a few days."

I supported this declaration, which I uttered with firmness and assurance, by the offer of a well-filled purse, and this brought a gracious smile to Bernard Tiquet's face. It was a good effect to begin with, and was bettered when by skilfully fingering my gift he had perceived with what kind of pieces it was filled. I saw by the way in which his face expanded that he scented gold. He was as quick in putting it in his pocket as he had been in reaching out for it, and then he made me a fine obeisance, and said :

"Would your lordship wish to sup?"

"Do not call me 'my lord,'" said I, finding it hard to keep my countenance. "I am from London, it is true; but, in the first place, I have dwelt so long in France that I have almost become your fellow-countryman, as you may judge by my accent, which is rather that of a Frenchman from the south than that of an Englishman . . . and besides, I should be averse to draw attention to myself. So just call me Monsieur le Chevalier."

"As you please, Monsieur le Chevalier," said my host, who to all appearance was quite free of the vice of irritating those who paid him. "Shall I tell my daughter to lay the table?"

"Yes . . . on one condition."

"A condition? You have but to name it, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"'Tis only that we all three sup together."

The old man opened his eyes wide.

"Are you surprised? Well, why? I do not like to take my meals alone, and you appear to me so pleasant a fellow that I should regret not to have you opposite to me. . . . Come now, Father Bernard, either I have no skill in judging men by their faces or you were once a soldier?"

I had put this question merely at random and for the sake of saying something; but it seemed I had guessed right, for the old inn-keeper answered me with evident satisfaction:

"Yes, Monsieur le Chevalier, in Henri IV.'s days . . . rare times and a good king ! . . . and if you will allow me I will relate what no man in France, perhaps, remembers so well as I—the entrance of the royal procession into Paris. . . . I made one in the company that followed ten paces behind His Majesty, and I can still see the rump and tail of his horse before me."

"You shall tell me what you like, rump and tail into the bargain, my worthy host ; only be quick."

Before I went downstairs I opened the window and remarked that the turbulence had not subsided in the Rue Saint-Antoine. I could even hear a noise of musketry at a distance. Then I experienced a scruple about the wilful inaction to which I was subjecting myself when my services might be of so great profit to the State. But this inward crying of misprized duty showed only one thing, namely, that I had finally capitulated, conscience and all, and that Madelon had the victory. I shut the window sharply to rid myself of that troop of little devils who come, spear in hand, to prick us after we have done an ill-deed, and to whom we in this world give the name of Remorse. I determined to think only of diverting myself. So I quickly dressed myself again, and was soon told that all was ready.

Master Bernard had shut his house as fast as a fortress in war-time, and he conveyed to me with much subtle and entangled periphrasis that he had neither been disposed to take sides with the cardinal

nor with the opposition openly, but tried to keep clear of all the movement proceeding around him. He had taken a part of modest neutrality, which went not beyond observation and reserve. I praised him highly for his prudence and then we went to table. Madelon trembled like a leaf when she took her place near to me, and I was vain enough to attribute her emotion to another feeling than a girl's natural timidity. Her father himself was not altogether at his ease, though he had resumed, as I assured myself by a stealthy glance, that famous coat of blue cloth which had been worn but once, on a solemn occasion, and which he had not been able to dispose of at a good price. But he took heart of grace when he had made a start with the chapter of history that he had officially put into his programme for me, as I have above narrated. This great matter of the triumphal entry of the King of Navarre was like an old refrain to my ears, for my father had often made me a bedtime tale of it, and if Bernard Tiquet's daughter had not acted as a very needful anti-opiate on my right, I have good reason to believe I should have gradually dropped off. But Madelon's proximity countervailed the baneful effect of her father's story, and he, seeing me so attentive, no doubt concluded he had a great talent as a narrator.

CHAPTER XXI

Proposals rejected—I seek further afield—I get to work—First difficulties—Scruples—I take the place by storm—A half confidence—The siege threatens to be prolonged—Well, we shall see—The husband arrives—I am delighted at his appearance—A ray of light—I guess the puzzle—A stratagem—A method of seduction which neither the father-in-law nor the son-in-law opposes—Another wedding-night spoiled—Two urgent letters—Nicolas Boutrel and old Tiquet set forth together—I am master of the ground—A smile from Madelon—Love's kindness—The end of the confidence—Madelon's tale—A singular bridegroom—An astounding way of employing a wedding-day—Ah, if Claudine were here !—I offer to take Claudine's place—Matters go badly for Nicolas—The absent are in fault—The marriage of Claudine and Gauthier—A comedy *au naturel*—Madelon plays her part to perfection—A risky climax—Nicolas returns—It was time—Two clowns—Poor Madelon !—Sadness after pleasure—Grievous regrets—I set forth.

I LET him go on as long as he had breath, and he spared me no single one of the details. He went back fifty years, thus making an excursion into the preceding century, and related to me how the Governor of Paris, the members of the Parlement, the provost of the trade-guilds and the aldermen held secret meetings, and were covertly in treaty with Henry IV. as to how they should bring about his entrance into Paris, and how the Sixteen, being privily warned of what

was in progress, gave notice of it to the Spaniards, who were at that time in garrison in the capital. Then, growing excited over his memories of a scene of which he had been so well-placed a beholder in spite of his insignificance, he told me—and I knew it so well!—that Henry IV.'s troops had made sure of the dangerous points and principal sites of Paris, and that the king himself had made his entry at seven o'clock in the morning by the Porte Saint-Honoré, the same gate by which Henry III., his predecessor, had quitted the town. His voice became tearful when he got to the formal and ceremonious delivery of the keys by the provost of the trade-guilds, Lhuillier, and I believe he fairly wept at recalling the admirable grace with which the king, who had just received a fine scarf from the Comte de Brissac, handed this gentleman the white scarf which he had himself been wearing and added the title of Marshal of France to the presentation.

In proportion as he made good King Henry IV. advance in his faithful city of Paris, I strove diligently to advance in my relations with Madelon. The warrior-king's system was an excellent example, and I tried to make myself worthy of so great a master. While Louis de Montmorency, debouching upon the Quai de l'École at the head of two hundred Swiss, was attacking the German foot-guard, and, as a commencement, throwing thirty of them into the river, I, more moderate but not a whit less

hardy, was seizing a frontier-land under the table, which brought me close to Madelon, and was keeping captive, with less truculent intentions, a hand that, after a smart resistance, had finally surrendered at discretion. When the bells, drums, and trumpets proclaimed to the league-men that the King was at length victorious all along the line, I drew Madelon, who hitherto had played the part of the rebellious league, towards me, till our knees and our feet, formerly in separate situations, joined in a touching communion, and seemed to conclude a firm and inviolable treaty of peace by the very fact of their proximity. Then Father Tiquet began upon the endless subject of good King Henry's acts of clemency. Captain Saint-Quentin was to be hanged by order of the Spaniards, and the gallows was forthwith thrown down. In the week which followed his accession he did nothing but grant pardons; pardon to the Duc de Feria, whose intrigues had been so injurious to him; pardon to Mesdames de Montpensier and de Nemours, who, as is well known, had declared themselves his remorseless enemies. When it thus rained pardons, could my pretty Madelon refuse me mine? Impossible. And a sweet pressure accorded to my hand assured me mysteriously that she wished to be no less generous than Henry IV.

Master Bernard's eloquence had, so to say, got into his head. I completed its effect by inviting him

to drink a toast in honour of the model king and his descendants. We drank to the living after we had drunk to the dead, and then, heavy with a half-tipsiness which overcame his mind but did him no other harm, he began to nod in his chair as often happens on the approach of sleep. I rose, Madelon did the same, and I whispered a few words to her, which I uttered, so to say, through my closed teeth.

"Await me very soon . . . in your room."

"To do what ? "

"Why, you know . . . to finish for me what you began so well."

"Oh, alone with you ! "

"Were we not alone together then ? "

"It was daytime."

"And at night ? "

"At night . . . I am afraid."

"The more reason I should keep you company."

"It is impossible."

"Now that is a sentence we will show to be false."

"Oh, indeed ! "

"So it's agreed ? "

"Not at all."

"In an hour."

"I forbid it."

"I shall come to you."

Bernard Tiquet opened one of his ill-looking eyes again, and Madelon resumed, raising her voice and feigning to continue a conversation proceeding between us :

"Ask my father, Monsieur le Chevalier. He will show you the room in which you are to stay so long as you remain with us."

"Oh, yes, yes," said her father, rising from his chair. "Show a light, daughter. And do you, Monsieur le Chevalier, be so kind as to come with me."

I was soon installed, and saw with pleasure that Master Tiquet's hostelry, in spite of the poor appearance it had on the outside, was not ill kept. I none the less regretted the room I had first been in and the hours of repose I had had in Madelon's bed.

The night began to seem long and wearisome. The distant buzz of the revolt in the town had now ceased, and I only heard from time to time the regular tramp of the patrols which passed through the various quarters in succession to bid those who were abroad late return home, and those who were within doors put out their fires. But who would think it? I felt no regret at all that I could not go forth and seek intelligence, but was condemned to remain completely ignorant of the news of the day. With whom had victory rested? Had Monsieur de la Meilleraye's troops covered themselves with glory, or had the worthy burgesses of Paris been turned, as it were by magic, into a triumphing phalanx of martyrs and heroes? Dare I own that this was my least preoccupation, and I did not even remember with what purpose I had sallied forth

that morning? My thoughts were not under my control, and my heart, started upon the pursuit of a new delight, was utterly given over, for the time, to the most exacting form of selfishness, the selfishness of the pleasures of love.

Despite Madelon's prudent advice and timid objections, I was determined to carry out my plan as I had stated it. I had made up my mind to wait for an hour, because I reckoned this time would suffice for old Bernard to get to bed. An incident which I could not have foreseen upset my nicely-balanced plans.

But here I must ask leave of the reader to take breath. No man's forces are limitless, and even love requires time to breathe.

Scarcely was I shut within my chamber and had got my nose against the window, when the hostelry resounded with a long outburst of crude and noisy mirth. I went out upon the landing to understand the cause of this uproar, and perceived Father Tiquet in the middle of the vestibule, where he was welcoming a great, tall fellow who answered his greetings by a long, loud laugh.

Two or three words made me understand how matters stood. The new-comer was none other than Master Nicolas Boutrel, ironmonger in the blind alley of the Hospitalières and Bernard Tiquet's son-in-law, who had just returned from Montlhéry. I went down to scrutinize him at close quarters and was delighted to see he was a villainous creature with rude manners

and all the air of a low rascal. I could not help being delighted at observing this, and yet out of goodness of heart and for the repose of my conscience, I accorded the tribute of an inward sorrow to Madelon.

I was yet holding mental colloquy with myself when Father Tiquet came up to me, clownishly rolling his cap between his fingers, and said to me in a humble and repentant tone :

“Did your honour chance to ring? I declare we heard nothing.”

And as by way of reply I did nothing but gaze at the man concerned, he resumed with a smile of triumph :

“He’s my son-in-law, Monsieur le Chevalier, he’s my son-in-law.”

“That being so, you have a pretty wife,” said I to the gross rascal, whose laughter still continued, sounding like a succession of noisy hiccoughs, “and the way to show yourself worthy of your happiness is to make her happy.”

To this commencement, which had the flavour of a sermon, I added some questions about the date of the felicitous union.

“Oh,” said Nicolas, who was good enough to leave off laughing for a moment, “we’re only half married, so to say, the real marrying, as the saw has it, is still to be done.”

Madelon entered at the instant, and blushed up to her eyes.

"If Monseigneur will allow it, Nicolas, kiss your wife," said Master Bernard, and he accompanied the words with a jocose slap upon the belly of the new-comer.

I know not why, but at that moment I would gleefully have strangled Goodman Tiquet, and itched to thrash the clown whom he honoured with the title of son-in-law. But I could do no more than intervene in such wise as to prevent the kiss, and I thought I discerned from a scarcely perceptible play of Madelon's features that this prompt manœuvre was not unwelcome to her. Then I recalled the young bride's half confidences and the mysterious though coarse declaration I had just heard from Nicolas Boutrel; in less than a second I had taken the sense of a thousand thoughts which it would be difficult to convey in detail, and which, in spite of their confusion, seemed as clear as possible to me. My decision was taken forthwith. To defer the continuance of my suit to Madelon till the following day would have been madness, or rather it would have been stupidity. On the other hand, in so odd a conjunction of circumstances, scruples would but have duped me.

"I will strike a decisive blow," said I to myself, though without a clear idea of what I was going to do. "I must be alone with Madelon. I must, at no matter what cost . . . or I am but an ass for the future."

Such a conclusion was terrifying, and I was ruined in my own eyes if I did not come out of the situation with credit to myself. My imagination set to work; quick as lightning it surveyed the possibilities and the impossibilities of the case, and returning from the excursion with the prey it sought, prompted to me word for word the little stratagem which here follows. I began by saying to Father Tiquet:

"You seemed surprised just now to see me come down, and you asked if I had need of anything . . ."

"I ask it again, Monsieur le Chevalier. Oh, our son-in-law's arrival will not make us forget what we owe you."

"Good. I have, in fact, to ask a most important service of you."

"I am all attention," said Master Bernard. "Sit you there, Nicolas, and keep quiet, and you, Madelon, keep still."

"I was going to bed," I resumed with all the solemnity in the world, "when on a sudden I remembered I had two pressing transactions to complete to-night. As a matter of fact all that has to be done is the carrying of two letters. But each of these two letters contains a state secret, and I can only entrust them to persons of good faith . . . and I thought, Master Bernard, that you would find in the neighbourhood two willing fellows who would go afoot one to the end of the Quartier Saint-

Germain, and the other on horseback to Fontenay-des-Roses."

"And must the letters be delivered . . . this very night?"

"Without further delay."

"H'm," said Nicolas Boutrel.

"As to paying the messengers," I continued, taking care my words should be pronounced very clearly, "I think they will be content with my terms. I shall give each man twenty louis."

Then what I had foreseen took place. Father Tiquet glanced slily, at Nicolas Boutrel, who answered the signal with a perturbed look. It would have given the former a fever to put a neighbour in the way of gaining twenty louis, and the second was scarcely more disposed to miss a windfall of the kind.

"If you will allow me, M'sieu le Chevalier," said the innkeeper, scratching his ear, "I should like to make an offer to you."

"And I the same," the ironmonger ventured to remark. His laughter had now died away except from the very end of his lips, and he seemed to be examining in his mind how many small amounts were contained in such a large total.

"Speak out, my worthy fellows. I am certain beforehand that the men you recommend would never break faith with me. Ah, I would sooner have dealt with you two . . . but on a day like this it is very

hard for a father to leave his daughter, and for a husband to leave his wife . . .”

“In your service, M’sieu le Chevalier,” cried Master Bernard, “there is nothing I would not do . . . and as for Nicolas . . .”

“Oh,” said I with a smile that I strove to render utterly careless, “that’s very different . . . not all the treasure in the world I expect would induce him to”

“Put off the little diversion in question for another night? Oh yes, good master,” cried Nicolas, whose eyes were glowing. “Our little Madelon has waited a week; she will wait two or three hours longer, won’t you, little wife?”

Madelon said never a word, and only lowered her eyes.

“Thou wantwit!” exclaimed old Tiquet interrupting him. “Are those things to ask? The little one does not even know what is meant.”

“Nay, but listen, father-in-law, at her age . . .”

I had no inclination to preside over a conference on conjugal metaphysics between Bernard and Nicolas. I cut short their wordy intentions by saying I was going to write my two despatches at once, and it was matter of urgency that my two messengers should get ready to start. Never had I been so punctually obeyed. The old innkeeper went to put on his iron-shod shoes, and Boutre! the ironmonger went forth at once to secure a horse. Madelon, who did not know

what to make of all she saw, brought me ink, pen and paper, and questioned me silently by an anxious glance I made as if I did not understand her, and set to work to write with the gravest and busiest air in the world.

The first letter: "I expect to return home to-morrow in the afternoon. Bruscambille will be responsible if everything is not ready when I arrive. As I know that the nights are a great temptation, especially when they are as warm as they now are, I beg Bruscambille to spare my wine, and prefer paying his day's expenses at a tavern."

The second letter: "To M. de Châtillon,—May I perish, my dear friend, if I know why I am writing to you to-night. I have nothing to tell you but that I love and highly honour you. I am ordering the messenger who brings you my letter to gallop post-haste at the risk of killing his horse. And so, good night! Nay, but to let the message serve me better, come and sup with me to-morrow. Perhaps I may have some such drolleries to tell, without naming the characters, you understand, as are worthy to divert you. Farewell!"

I gave particular care to the folding and sealing of these two letters; for, as has been seen, they dealt with very important matters. Master Bernard and Nicolas Boutrel reappeared almost at the same time, the one making the soles of his travelling-boots clatter on the stone floor of the passage, and the

other showing me, through one of the windows on the ground floor, the sturdy beast which was to carry him to his destination. I handed him the letter addressed to M. de Châtillon. Father Tiquet took charge of the letter I was sending to Bruscamille at the Hôtel Roquelaure. A crowning piece of sleight-of-hand prevented Nicolas from getting to Madelon's side. I had resolved in my high wisdom that I would not allow the parting kiss. It was as much as I would do to allow of Master Tiquet bestowing his blessing. I gave neither of them time to breathe. I kept them agog with injunctions and contradictory orders, with a mighty buzzing of sentences, and may the deuce take me if the closest pedant in Paris could have extracted a word of sense from them. Speeches with every pretension to real importance are often made of which the same thing might be said.

Being thus impressed with the imaginary gravity of their office, my two messengers set forth. Nicolas was so convinced he was filling the part of a weighty personage, and the success of his mission might secure him the captaincy of the trained bands of the Hospitalières Quarter, that my efforts to cut off all communications between him and his wife were quite superfluous. But Master Bernard kept his head clear enough to call out to his daughter :

“Madelon . . . no silliness! Get up to thy room, but do not go to sleep, and take care that

if the Chevalier finds himself in need of anything he has no cause to complain of thee."

Then the door was shut loudly, and it seemed to me, though 'twas a mistake perhaps, that the innkeeper's last order had called a little smile of simple amazement to the girl's lips. But on a reflection, the depth of which I will not fathom here, her face assumed a more serious and well-nigh a frightened expression.

I understood well enough that my pretty Madelon was in one of those false positions whence only aid from without can extricate the victim. So it was my cue to come to her assistance.

"Your father," I said to her, "bade you go to your room. May I lead you thither?"

She let me take her arm, and that was her only answer; I thought it as good as another. There were some twenty steps to the story above, and I made a little halt on each, and thus prolonged the journey, which strictly was but of a minute or two.

When we were seated before the alcove that contained her bed, she crossed her hands and said to me:

"I do not know whether I am dreaming. Is it really true that my father has gone out and that Nicolas Boutrel . . .?"

"Is trotting at this instant on the Fontenay road. Nothing is more sure within the bounds of possibility, my dear Madelon."

"But by what strange chance?"

"In spite of all obstacles I meant to hear the rest of your confidence to-night, and I sought the means to be alone with you. Have I not succeeded?"

"What, those two letters?"

"It would have been the same had I written to the Shah of Persia or the Khan of Tartary. Invention, pure invention! And now, dear Madelon, finish your story for me . . ."

"How far had I got?" said Madelon, now grown dreamy.

"To our return from the church. Claudine, your friend, had told you all sorts of wonders about that first retirement with your husband, and no doubt you were waiting for all the fine things to come true."

"Yes, and then someone came to tell Nicolas that his cousin at Monthéry was dead . . . oh, you have such a wonderful memory, Monseigneur!"

"And then?"

"Then . . . then . . . Nicolas seemed to forget all about me. I was there, near him, dressed in white, with pretty knots of ribbon in my dress and blossoms in my hair. . . . My mind was full of the fine things Claudine had told me, and I thought the time had come at last to profit by the lessons she had given me . . . for Claudine had told me that with a husband you should be both amiable and coquettish. . . . I did not quite know what those words meant. But I could have tried to find out, and perhaps I should have succeeded . . . for I

think that even if you are not clever there are things you understand after a little while . . . without anybody's help. . . ."

"Well?"

"Well, Monseigneur, Nicolas began to talk of his cousin's property with my father, and they both agreed that he ought to go to Montlhéry at once. My father went to get everything ready; so Nicolas was left with me."

Madelon seemed embarrassed, and began alternately to tie and untie the bow of her girdle-strings, which were fastened at her waist.

"Why do you stop there?" I murmured, with emotion in my voice, drawing the charming child towards me. "Am I not your friend? May I not hear it all? Cannot I foresee to my cost what must have happened? Nicolas made the most of the fleeting moments; he overwhelmed you with caresses; he besought you on both knees to give him a foretaste of his bliss . . ."

"He went and seated himself quietly at this desk," replied Madelon, with the finest composure imaginable, "and added up figures for a whole hour."

"And was that all?"

"That was all."

"Madelon, you are making game of me."

"I have told you the truth."

"And then?"

"Then my father told him that one of our neighbours had offered him his mule, and that he could start."

"And he started without saying anything more?"

"Oh yes, yes . . . without even saying farewell to me."

"Madelon, what did you think of his behaviour?"

"Nothing at all . . . or very little . . . I thought Claudine had been making a fool of me, and then I thought no more about it. Besides, I knew Master Nicolas so little that I was hardly surprised he had nothing to say to me. I should have been more surprised if it had been the other way. But if you will promise to answer me without laughing at me, Monseigneur, I should like to ask you just a question."

"I? Laugh at you? Oh, my little Madelon, what a hateful thought!"

"But . . . but . . . what I am going to ask you is very . . . bold."

"What is it?"

"It would be to take Claudine's place and explain, that is if possible, quite without thinking of Nicolas's way of behaving, some notions that came into my mind . . . since the morning, Monseigneur, and that troubled me so much and upset me so, I don't even know what I want, or what I think, and I almost feel inclined to cry . . ."

"My poor little Madelon, dry your tears at once,

and think that I am Claudine. I am listening to you tell me your grief at once."

"My grief," said she, drawing her breath laboriously, "my grief . . . I should find it very hard to explain it . . . all I can tell you, for I feel it strongly, is that I have felt cold and indifferent to Nicolas for a whole week, and *now* I hate him."

This declaration, uttered with zeal and conviction, advanced my interest beyond my first hopes. I drew my chair near to Madelon's, took her hands, and said :

"Hatred, my pretty child, is a very gloomy sentiment, and in its train follow only care and disappointment. I am sorry for you ; hatred eats up one's life . . ."

"After all," resumed Madelon, drawing her hands away, "it is very likely I am wrong. Who knows? Perhaps all husbands are like Nicolas, and anyone else in his place would have done as he did."

"Now, allow me to tell you, my little friend, that what you say is far from certain."

"Oh, if Claudine were here !"

"What would happen ?"

"I should know what to think."

"Was it not agreed that I should take her place ?"

"Oh, you would never do so well."

"I will do much better, Madelon ; I will do a thousand times better."

And as I thus pledged myself to do better than Claudine, I added the eloquence of gesture to that of words; Madelon's wrists, to which my hands were acting as a kind of bracelets, had at length yielded to a pressure that I made at once gentle and strong. Weary of contending, and perhaps of free will, she left me in possession of her pretty arms, whence a slight, enervating moisture was now exhaled after her efforts to release herself. I bestowed great care upon my method of action, for I considered that Madelon was of such a character as is not to be dominated by violence, but of those who bring themselves to subjection of their own will under the condition that certain tests be fulfilled in due course. All fortresses are not to be taken with a rush. Besides, I regarded the time I had before me as amply sufficient to admit of my proceeding in surety to the conclusion, which I meant not to precipitate. I felt that the place in question, protected by a triple wall which Mademoiselle de Scudéry would have termed innocence, instinctive modesty and chastity, was impregnable, unless I displayed a rare prudence and the utmost gentleness. On these occasions a man has not to show violence. If some faithless warder, persuaded by your eloquence or corrupted by your gold, will open the little gate of the citadel for you, the campaign is won. The real question is that of getting the keys, and the rest will accomplish itself.

Madelon was reflecting.

"What are you thinking of?" I asked her.

"Of Claudine's happiness."

"So she is happy?"

"So she wrote to me . . . but in a few words . . . she gave me no details . . . she was to explain it all to me on her first journey hither."

"And she has not come yet?"

"Alas, no."

"If she told you she was happy," I resumed with growing ardour, "the explanation of her words is the simplest thing in the world, and every man knows as much about it as she does herself. . . Though I have never seen her nor her husband, I can tell you, from beginning to end, all that passed when first they were alone together. . ."

"Oh . . . that would be too much!" cried Madelon, whose eyes glowed like two flames in the shadows.

"Well, it is something to learn."

"It would be different if you knew her . . . oh, little Claudine is as sweet as sweet."

"The more reason I shall make no mistake . . . and he . . . who is—if I recollect right—a master spurrier at Orleans, what sort of a man is he, eh?"

"Who . . . Gauthier?"

"Yes, her husband."

"Why, Monseigneur, when he came here before marrying Claudine, he passed for a very handsome man . . ."

"In that case it is impossible to mistake, and if you ever make Claudine fulfil her promise, you will be obliged to own, my dear Madelon, that I had guessed right, and that I am . . . something of a sorcerer. Now, only give me your attention . . ."

"Do not go too fast," Madelon said to me seriously, "for I am not very quick, and to understand rightly I want time."

"I am sorry for your way of learning, my dear Madelon, but you must manage to keep pace with my instruction, there is no help for it; I am the master, and you the pupil, and the lesson must take its course . . . or rather, I am an actor and you are the audience, and in all conscience you must not let the scene grow flat . . . But no, I have a better idea still. As the instruction I am about to give you is nothing of the sort, and the pupil sometimes does better in it than the master, we will still remain, if you agree, my little Madelon, on a footing of perfect equality; it matters not whether we play a comedy, a pastoral or a ballet, provided we play it together, and I declare with a little docility and if you help me the least little bit in the world, you will manage your part as well as I manage mine and very likely better . . . So, now that is understood, you are Claudine, and I am Gauthier."

"That is to say," murmured Madelon, blushing, "you are my husband."

"And you my wife."

" Oh, but it makes me tremble."

" Take heart of grace, it's only a beginning."

" Well . . . but . . . you are at my feet."

" That is the custom."

" What ? So close to me ? "

" Even closer still."

" But what do you want to do with my arms ? "

" Kiss them like this."

" You are pressing me too tight."

" That is the way my part goes. . . "

" Monseigneur . . . "

" I am not Monseigneur, I am Gauthier . . .
and I am fulfilling my duty."

" Your duty ! . . . But then . . . Nicolas . . .
my real husband . . . ? "

" Is a brute . . . "

" And Gauthier . . . ? "

" Makes Claudine happy. . . . Did she not tell
you so, Madelon ? "

Upon reflection, I think that Madelon and I played
neither a pastoral nor a ballet.

It was a pantomime.

As I had foreseen, the pupil was quite capable
of teaching her master, so true is it that inspiration
is better than talent, and that nature ever preserves
that superiority over art which the simplest creations
of the Divine Principle will always retain over the
most complicated works of man.

I do not think that in my whole life I have ever

witnessed more willing abandonment united with more simple amazement. . . .

But let us draw a veil over pictures which should be but sketched, if that vague and humid tint is to be preserved in them that makes the beauty of perspectives. In certain circumstances to keep silence is the way to express everything.

Two o'clock was striking in the clock of Saint-Gervais when the violent opening of the front door warned us of the return of one of our messengers, or of both together. In either case we had to separate, and our leavetaking was no longer than the situation required. But I found time to tell her that I had given her father a false name, that I was no Englishman, as good luck would have it, but bore the name of Marquis de Roquelaure.

Madelon smiled and made answer that since she was Claudine for the time she could only think of me as Gauthier; then she shut herself in her room, and I ascended once more to mine, where I bolted myself in so that I need only open the door when I would and to whom I would.

Almost at the same moment a conversation was commenced which told us what we sought to know. The father-in-law and the son-in-law had returned at the same time.

"What a funny thing!" cried Nicolas Boutrel. "So you did not hurry yourself, Father Bernard?"

"Eh, well, I have not such strong legs as our

neighbour's mule ; but all the same you have made her go a good rate ; you whipped her up, eh ? ”

“ Zookers, but I made her gallop the whole way . . . she's no beast of mine, and the neighbour is a niggard for asking me a whole crown for the loan of her—a vile Jew ! If she's a bit winded to-morrow, 'tis no concern of mine . . . did you find the folk you sought, Father Tiquet ? ”

“ Yes, indeed . . . and you ? ”

“ So did I . . . Should we go to the gentleman and tell him we are back ? ”

“ Why, surely, and this very minute too.”

“ Very well . . . and the twenty louis . . . I hope he will give them to us now.”

“ Oh, I'm not uneasy about that. We had a little account to settle together this morning, and I know the way he pays.”

While they were thus chattering they reached my landing. I did not wait till they knocked, but opened at once and explained my vigil by the impatience I had felt to know of their return. And at the same time the promised rewards were dropped into two hands as dry and talon-like as those of an attorney. When I saw them withdraw, their faces glowing with delight over the sound of the gold, and casting furtive glances around them as if they feared someone would snatch their prey from them, I could not but think of the vast distance that separated the father from the daughter, and the bridegroom from the girl who

had been given him for wife ; and then, as a corollary to this thought, which was instinct with anger, jealousy, and love, I uttered two words whereby the selfishness of my own regret was veiled under the form of compassion and pity :

“ Poor Madelon ! ”

* * * * *

At noon on the following day I quitted my room ; the interval had been filled for me with fits of impetuous madness and insensate dreams. I once more beheld Master Tiquet, and found his face repulsive ; Nicolas Boutrel, whose ugliness now appeared more hideous than ever ; and Madelon—and her face seemed to me to have grown yet more beautiful.

I cannot describe the fever into which I was thrown by the sight of these three. I knew not what to do, I knew not what to say ; everything was a weariness to me, everything annoyed me and hurt me . . . everything . . . even Madelon's smile.

It was torture after ecstasy, hell after heaven . . .

I could not endure the continuance of it.

I threw a last handful of gold to the two misers, I cast a last glance on Madelon . . . and I went away miserable.

CHAPTER XXII

Count d'Alais—Details at racing pace—The Chancellor's coach—Master Raguenet's halberd and the First President's beard—The triumph of Councillor Broussel—I get home at last—An awkward reception—Inconveniences of the Master's absence—Dark explanations—Bruscambille as orator—A devoted valet—The aspect of the court—Gaiety to order—The Queen and Cardinal Mazarin—Bautru's opportune jest—How the Abbé de la Rivière caught cold—The game of "Opposition"—M. and Madame Tambonneau—One of M. de Châtillon's love affairs—M. de Montereul gives us a comedy—A dismal diversion—Pierre Corneille—The President's wife's supper—We make it quits—Madame Tambonneau's character—We will think about it—Ménage—How a dying man was recalled to life by his worthy spouse—A new kind of medicine recommended to be used by wives whose husbands are dying—Another Lazarus—An intelligent doctor—The hundred cuckolds of M. de Morblanc—His wife's modest answer—A troubled night—An attack of robbers—Bruscambille performs prodigies of valour—The Lieutenant-Civil Daubray—Virtue rewarded.

A whole epoch is comprised in thirty hours in times of political crisis, so I felt as strange in the streets of Paris when I set my face homewards again as if I had returned from the Congo; and perceiving the Comte d'Alais, whose coach was turning the corner of the quai in the direction of the Grand Châtelet, I ran up to him and told him plainly that I

would not quit him till he had fully satisfied my
• curiosity.

Homer would have written ten volumes on all that had happened in this short space of time, and I should think it the end of the world if my memory succeeded in classing in orderly fashion the incredible mass of incidents piled one upon the other. Even now I recall them in a very blurred way, and though I have often had occasion to pass those times in review since then, I yet regard the abundance of incident in so narrow a frame, as it were, as a prodigy.

The Queen was much disposed to gratify her royal moods, and the Cardinal was very stubborn in his views, and it seems they had together determined to send the Chancellor Pierre Séguier to the Parlement charged with the duty (which I would never have accepted) of begging the gentlemen of that chamber to get back quietly to their homes, and dedicate their minds rather to their private interests than to affairs of state. It was a difficult compliment to deliver. But the chancellor consented to present it at the risk of being greeted with jeers and hisses . . . but 'twas written among the decrees of Heaven that he should be spared the task. The chancellor could neither pass in his carriage by the Quai de la Mégisserie nor by the Quai des Orfèvres, where chains had been hung, so he had his chair brought ; for very luckily he had ordered it to follow him, and thus he proceeded on his way with no great obstruction till he

came to the Hôtel de Luynes, and, as everyone knows, the Seine and the Pont Saint-Michel are to be seen from the windows of this place.

But, having got thither, he was recognised by some poor devil or other whom he had cast in a suit before the council—these suitors-at-law have such an infernal great deal of memory!—and came very near to being cut down. An outcry was raised all around that he was going to the palace for the purpose of preventing the Parlement from meeting, and then for a little more he would have been thrown over the parapet. Thus his story and mine were to some extent alike; but he had run no one through, and did no more than rush within the Hôtel de Luynes, where he hid, first on the staircase, then in a room, and lastly within a wall. Then one of those skirmishes took place such as commence, develop, and subside no one knows how. They were about to set fire to the house, which was beyond doubt a rather turbulent mode of coming at their wishes, when the Marshal de la Meilleraye interfered at the head of three companies of French and Swiss guards and overbore the seething mob in a trice.

However, the advantage he gained did not last, and was of little importance. The marshal was compelled to fall back; and during his retreat blood was shed on both sides. In the meanwhile, the chancellor had escaped in Town-Lieutenant Daubray's coach. Threatening bands were to be

seen in all directions, marching with drums at the head and standards made by fastening bits of linen to poles. The first barricade had been raised in front of the church of Saint-Leufroy, and the example, as I myself had had a brief opportunity of seeing, was at once followed throughout the town, so that in less than half an hour the chains were everywhere, and behind them a double or triple range of barrels filled with soil, stones or dung, and the citizens were entrenched by these like folk besieged, prepared to resist an attack behind the lines of their battlements.

The Comte d'Alais gave me many more details which would have very little zest if repeated here. The open-air conference which had taken place at the Croix-du-Trahoir between Master Ragueneau, iron-merchant, and the First President, formed his chief topic, and he could not refrain from laughing when he told me that after some hard questions which the First President had not answered, as was no doubt desired, they had so far outraged decorum as to pull some half-dozen hairs from his beard ; he wore a very long one, as I still remember quite clearly.

To be brief, things seemed at length to have been pretty well botched up. The two councillors whose names had served as a pretext for the mutinous spirits, had reached the town at ten in the morning, and the queen had at last resolved to send out *lettres de cachet* for the return of the others who had been banished. So I appeared once more just as every-

thing seemed at an end or nearly so. M. d'Alais, however, pointed out to me a large number of skiffs which were lying off in the river in various directions, and when I asked him what was the meaning of this circumstance, he replied that it had to do with the return of Councillor Broussel—who after alighting from his coach at Notre Dame had been escorted to his house by a very great throng of people, and had then appeared at one of the windows which looked out upon the water in the direction of La Grève, and this circumstance had drawn together so great a number of people that a good part of the worthy citizens found no place on firm ground, and had taken boat and put out to admire him at their ease. Never in his life had Goodman Broussel been at such a gala.

I quitted d'Alais, who was going to Vincennes to carry certain urgent orders (note that I had delayed him nearly an hour), and I hastened back to my house. As soon as I set foot within the courtyard, there arose within me one of those presentiments which hardly ever deceive us, and scarcely ever fail to warn us silently when our absence has brought us some mishap or other. The stir that was caused by the sight of me, sufficient to set the whole kitchen, servants' quarters and stable in movement, warned me that there was some troublesome news to tell me, and Bruscombille's perturbed face confirmed the apprehension. Nobody said a word. My coachman Boquette had just been grooming the horses, and

he was passing the brush from one hand to the other without raising his eyes. Two footmen who were under Bruscombille's patronage were holding their little hats, which resembled Venetian birettas, with the ends of their fringers, and the groom, who had put a horrible skullcap on his head, no doubt that he might protect his hair from the flying dust to the dungheap, was standing in a corner with a shame-faced and terrified air, as if he had committed some impertinence which called for the strap or the stick.

"What do you all mean by these long faces?" I asked, as I passed the frightened assemblage in review. "What, does no one answer? . . . Ah, you pack of rogues, I will find a way to make you speak."

I made as if I would draw my sword, and this proved a good way with them, for they all drew near with gestures of supplication, and passing from one extreme to another, now all wanted to talk at once.

"Monseigneur, imagine . . ."

"Monseigneur, only think . . ."

"If you knew, Monseigneur . . ."

"Monseigneur, I must tell you . . ."

"The truth is, Monseigneur . . ."

I stopped my ears and requested my men to imitate the gentlemen of the Parlement, and choose a spokesman to harangue for them. Bruscombille put himself forward in a smooth-tongued way, and I accepted him.

"If Monseigneur will be so good as to take the

trouble to come within," said he, "I will tell him all that has happened, while busying myself about him as his valet."

I went within, and I felt a glow of pleasure in finding myself once more inside my Paris house. Bruscombille, whose solicitude about me knew no bounds, began by asking whether I should prefer to rest or go out; and upon my replying that it was my intention to be carried in my chair to the Palais-Royal, he questioned me no further, but brought me one of my finest coats, being of pearl-grey Spanish cloth, with a collar of *point coupé*, and my hat of light-coloured felt with yellow plumes, that he might show his ready understanding and good taste. Having placed all this before me not without ostentation, he opened the door of my bath-room and followed me thither with a flask of scented Spanish water which he knew I was wont to use when I was bound on visits of gallantry or ceremony.

But all these little attentions seemed to me somewhat exaggerated, and I said to him in a sharp voice :

"Well, let us come to the matter."

"So I shall, Monsieur le Marquis, so I shall. But first I should like to put just one question to you."

"What is it?"

"Was there much money in your *secrétaire* yesterday morning?"

"That is a funny thing for you to trouble your mind about, Master Rascal."

"Oh, pardon me, Monsieur le Marquis, pardon me. I only wanted to know if you could make your calculations on positive and certain knowledge. You see, if the coffer was well filled then, it is not so now."

"So I have been robbed?"

"This very night, Monsieur le Marquis."

"This is a well-kept house, upon my honour!" cried I, in anger. "You are a dozen of long-eared losels here, who only live by your eyes and arms, yet you saw nothing and did nothing and never prevented the theft!"

"I would beg Monsieur le Marquis to be so good as to observe that I sleep in a kind of little glazed cupboard at the very top of this staircase, and in all conscience I may consider myself as not concerned in the misfortune. That explains my calm and composure . . ."

"Well, I see you have not lost your assurance!"

"The *others*," said Bruscambille in a yet softer tone, "were not so calm as I, Monsieur le Marquis will have noticed that just now."

"What—do you suspect . . .?"

"Who? I? Suspect my comrades! Oh!" cried the worthy valet with a display of honest indignation, "I could not think of such a thing. But they had their reasons for not looking Monsieur le Marquis in the face. . . ."

"Then they are guilty?"

“Of the theft? Oh, no . . . but they have been negligent and careless. The robbers, to get to your private room, had to pass through the room below where the groom sleeps, and through the coachman’s room, and they forced the lock of his door, and in front of the attic where the head cook sleeps. I will say nothing of the Suisse, for he is nearly seventy years old, and you only keep him out of respect to the memory of your father, Monsieur le Maréchal . . . but the others are young and strong and so highly paid! To think they were there and heard nothing! Monsieur le Marquis will agree with me that only the dead ought to sleep so soundly as that.”

I had got my recollection as clear as I could during this long peroration of Bruscombille’s, and I now said to him:

“I glanced into the coffer yesterday morning, and took from it a round sum, but there ought to be about a thousand louis in gold in it.”

Bruscombille frowned, assumed the important air of a court underling, and then resumed with a fine air of certitude:

“Does Monsieur le Marquis set store by recovering those few hundreds?”

“I do not think the ocean which has swallowed them will easily yield them up again, and I think we should get more trouble than advantage in trying to make it. In my view the best thing is to leave them where they are.”

"But if I could get the thief?"

"Keep him prisoner . . . we will have him hanged."

"I cannot undertake," replied Bruscombille, "to deliver him to Monsieur le Marquis alive . . . but I might very likely deliver him dead . . ."

"Oh, you have turned mighty warlike!"

"Since the robbery happened I have got a whole arsenal of weapons close to my bed . . . and if the miserable wretch, enticed by such easy prey at first, dares to meddle in our affairs again . . . bang! . . . I will settle his business with the full charge of a blunderbuss or pistol."

"Oh, you may sleep in peace. You make the Paris thieves out much more stupid than they are. They know that their excursions are hazardous, and that they should never try the same place twice. My thousand louis are lost for good, and you will have nothing but your trouble in return for your preparations . . ."

"We shall see, we shall see," murmured my incomparable valet. "I have an idea that these villains skulk all around here, and would like to pry into the other corners of the place. Anyhow, they will have a warm reception . . . I answer for that!"

I did not think it necessary to hear more, and went to my coffer, on which I cast a regretful glance; it was in fact completely swept and garnished, and the clasps of it seemed to be badly injured. Traces of

the thieves were to be seen everywhere, on the doors, the locks and the furniture. The only reflection that occurred to me was, how did it come about that people who knew nothing of my private habits went straight to a place of security, only to be got at by a spring, and one so marvellously complicated, as I had always thought, that I would have defied Satan himself to get his claw on it and find out how it worked? But after all I was not likely to find satisfactory reasons for what had taken place, so I put an end to the futile mental enquiry, and gave all my thoughts to completing my attire and getting out of the house. At first the thousand louis I had lost recurred to my mind with rare persistency; but I soon got the better of the thought of them and imagined, to banish my chagrin about them, that I had lost them at bassett or lansquenet.

When I arrived at the palace I learned that a decree had been signed for the breaking down of the barricades and for making the populace lay down their arms. Every face I saw displayed a frank and open gaiety which nobody felt. But the timid—and they are everywhere to be found—said that M. de Beaufort, who had recently escaped from the Bastille, and had since been at La Flèche, had taken post and was making all speed towards Paris. The fear thus expressed was easy to understand, for Beaufort, a man at once meddlesome and ineffective, had no skill but in one direction: he knew how to flatter the

passions of the people, and might thus become, in the posture of affairs that then held, an additional obstacle or even an additional danger. His return, if it were a fact, certainly had the merit of being well timed.

I had occasion that day to admire the self-possession shown by Cardinal Mazarin. He was seated on a stool of cramoisy cloth with gold fringe at about three paces distance from the queen, and the pleasant and tranquil expression of his face seemed to give the lie to those dark rumours of disgrace and fall which his keenest opponents, the suffragan at their head, had set in motion about him. He was smiling to everybody, as if he had been a secure and beloved monarch in the midst of an adoring court. Anne of Austria, though she was more wrought upon, bore the diadem which shone on her forehead in a royal fashion; but the glory of that crown seemed to me more like the splendour of lightning on a stormy night than like a star in a summer sky. It was plain that she had been deeply hurt, and the queenly pride in her had not yet recovered from the cruel affronts and deep humiliation to which she had been subjected. As a matter of fact, the opposition of the Parlement wounded her, the surrender of the prisoners was an act of weakness, which the necessities of the moment had wrung from her painfully, and she thought that when she thus let her own rights be wrested from her, she was imperilling the rights of

her son the king. While she was in this mood, I entered with Monsieur de Bautru, who, mistrusting the effects of his gay and jovial manner, had assumed the appearance of one profoundly afflicted.

"Eh! . . . What is the matter, Monsieur de Bautru?" said Queen Anne, smiling, "I have never seen you so overcome with sadness. . . ."

"Alas, madam," said Bautru, who thought it better to make no allusion to the circumstances of the hour, and so framed an answer at haphazard, "I was thinking of the Abbé de Rivière."

"Is he not at Rome?" asked Mazarin.

"And went thither to seek his cardinalate," added the Prince.

"He has returned," said Bautru with a sigh . . . "but he is not well."

"What ails him, then?" resumed the Queen, whose interest was caught.

"Why, this, madam," said Bautru. "He could not get the hat he went to seek, so his head was bare as he came back, and he caught cold."

Bautru's jest was received with much laughter on all hands. Anne of Austria resumed forthwith:

"You have the skill to make us merry about everything, Monsieur de Bautru, you should find some means to make the posture of our affairs less unwelcome. Know you nothing fresh about the mind of these poor Parisians, such good folk at heart and so devoted to the royal house, but so easily misled?"

"As your Majesty deigns to ask me the question,

I will offer a reflection which occurred to me just now, while I was passing through Montmartre. Some shopboys were enjoying the pastime of a fight, after the manner of the opposition to your Majesty, when a troop of the archers fell suddenly among them, and threatened to give them a strong escort back to the city, if they began the game again. Then these youths made protestations of obedience, and the archers went away. But no sooner were their backs turned and they out of sight, than the game of the opposition was renewed with the former zest. Well, I know not if your Majesty will be of my way of thinking, but I thought the incident gave the lineaments of what is passing around us very clearly. Just when the gentlemen of the Parlement are raising their loudest outcry, M. d'Orléans enters the chamber, and there is silence. Restrained by His Highness's presence, they even say the wisest things imaginable now and then. But no sooner has M. d'Orléans turned his back, than the tumult is louder than before, and a man might swear at times that they would come to blows at it. Gentlemen—as we are all body and soul devoted to Her Majesty and to Monseigneur le Cardinal—do not we play the part of the archers, and are not the gentlemen of the Parlement the gang of shopboys? ”

The cardinal nodded assent with a satisfied air, and left Anne of Austria to speak. She soon resumed with much composure and firmness :

“ It is a true parallel, Monsieur de Bautru; but we

have all an interest in making it inapplicable as soon as possible. Happy will the day be when our brave archers have succeeded in snatching from the turbulent band a weapon which some of them sometimes use without loyalty."

Those conferences at which such great personages as a queen and a prime minister are present never last long. So we soon returned the way we came. In spite of the bright memories I had brought from my short stay with Madelon, I was happy to find myself once more in the current of my ordinary life, and I promised myself a keen delight in repairing, one after the other, the meshes of the nets I had spread in matters of amours, which were torn here and there. A few months of absence had almost thrown me out, and I had need of the company of my merry friends to put me in the way again.

I wonder whether Châtillon guessed this invisible posture of my thoughts? I cannot tell. But in any case he came up to me, and would not leave me till I had promised to go with him that night to the house of President Tambonneau, where a play, a supper, and a ball were to be given, in spite of the late troubles in the town. I scarcely knew Tambonneau, or, to put it better, I only knew him by sight. He was a comptroller, and his manner was not considered of the best. He was ill-made, and had the reputation of a mean fellow, and at first I felt no strong inclination to form a friendship with

a person of that kind. But Châtillon assured me that his wife was greatly superior to him, and I could but yield to so excellent a reason.

Châtillon had spoken truly. Madame Tambonneau was a very pretty little woman, of a graceful form, with a certain boldness in her glances, and very charming in her movements. The company she entertained that night was very numerous, and excellently chosen. The moment after I had been introduced to her I found myself surrounded by a crowd of faces that I had been accustomed to meet in excellent society. In less than an hour I had engaged in conversation with President le Cogneux, M. de Boutteville, the Marquis de Flamarens, who was afterwards killed in the fight at Saint-Antoine, and M. de Ruvigny. As for Châtillon, I found it impossible to give him the benefit of any one of my reflections, so busy was he round the skirts of our hostess. I immediately understood that, while M. Tambonneau paid the expenses of the evening, the hero of it was my good friend Châtillon. The promised performance was managed by M. de Monte-reul, the man of whom Madame de Sévigné one day said that he was twelve times as giddy as a cockchafer. It began about nine o'clock to an accompaniment of murmured jests and half-stifled ridicule among the audience. And in point of fact never was anything more crude and ridiculous offered to the judgment of people who had been educated in criti-

cism by the brilliant advance made at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. They mangled some tragedy of Rotrou's which failed to make us weep, and a farce in the Italian manner which failed to make us laugh. M. Tambonneau showed that the performance affected him, but in vain. Yawning was perpetual and general throughout the company. As for me, I should certainly have fallen asleep in the very crisis of the tragedy if my attention had not been caught by the arrival of the illustrious M. de Corneille, who, since January in the year last past, had occupied the seat in the Academy vacated by the death of M. Maynard.

The supper was much better than the play. There was plenty of merriment and a hundred facetious things were recounted, each more amusing than the last. Tambonneau, excited by wine, told us confidences about his wife, and among other things which made her blush to the roots of her hair, that she was enterprising in a *tête-à-tête*, very inclined to pleasures, and that he would be her beau if he were not her husband, seeing that he had never known a woman who was such *good stuff* as she. Châtillon was furious at hearing all this twaddle, for a woman's lover has almost always more modesty concerning her than her husband. As for me, I took this information—which I had not sought—for what it was worth, reserving the right to consider it as beside the mark, or to profit by it according to future circumstances.

If I set myself to relate all that was said from the beginning of this supper to the end of it, I should write a long history. So I will but repeat a story that Ménage told us with a great deal of wit when dessert was just being served. Someone had just mentioned M. d'Amboise, and there was a fire of questions and remarks about him.

"Poor M. d'Amboise!"

"He was very ill."

"Is he better?"

"Is he dead?"

"It would be a pity."

"You are speaking of M. d'Amboise," said Ménage, speaking louder than anybody else. "I went to see him this morning, and I can give you news of him. He very nearly died last night."

"So," said Tambonneau, swallowing a bumper of Narbonne wine, "it was all over with him to-day."

"Not at all," answered Ménage.

"He escaped?"

"Yes."

"What is the name of the doctor?" asked Madame Tambonneau, laughing.

"Oh . . . the doctor had nothing to do with it."

"Incredible!"

"You shall see. I think there is not one of us here who is not acquainted with his wife, a Mademoiselle de la Hillière when she married him, and from Touraine?"

"Oh, yes," said one and another from all parts of the table."

"Well, my friends, she saved him!"

Everyone will understand the curiosity that this phrase aroused. Many of those present, who had seen the sick man two days before, would gladly have prescribed extreme unction for him. M. Guesnault, his doctor, when he paid his last visit, had said that he could give no further instructions, and that all his fancies might be humoured, which is a magnanimous treatment employed by the faculty when they mean the heirs to make preparations for the funeral.

"Tell us, tell us!" cried the company, which seemed as unanimous as if it listened with one pair of ears.

Ménage resumed with the lawyer-like tone that I think he had from his father, for I have heard it said that, though he was a barrister himself, he never handled a brief; he resumed, I say, rising that he might be better heard:

"Poor D'Amboise had been dying for a week, and the doctors, M. Guesnault at their head, were damning each other because they could not give an exact name to his disease. A very little more and they would have held a sitting at the Academy to christen his illness with the first name they could think of; for our modern children of Æsculapius are like those of the classical time, they do not mind a

patient dying, but cannot endure that he should die without letting them know why he does so. However, they had almost made up their mind, and the priest of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois came at six o'clock yesterday evening, with breviary and crucifix in hand, to bring the dying man the only thing he still stood in need of upon this earth, that is to say, a safe-conduct in good Catholic form, and it seems that every one of us has serious need of that to get from this world into the other without difficulties. Everything passed in the most suitable way. The priest said what he had to say, or—to put it more plainly—wished him a pleasant journey, as is the practice between priest and layman among good Christians; thereupon he withdrew with what promptitude he might, for he had a marriage to celebrate at midnight, and the incumbents of fat parishes sometimes have as much and more to do than the ushers of great houses. Baptisms, marriages, burials—a terrible medley of folk who are coming into the world, settling in it and going out of it, all elbowing one another to get attended to first, and the priest is always there busy with opening and shutting the door . . . But to proceed . . . The priest set out, and D'Amboise and his wife were left alone together."

"Ah!" exclaimed certain impatient hearers whom the clerical digression that Ménage had made had not greatly interested.

D'Amboise was growing visibly weaker. His

face changed in succession from yellow to green and from green to that purplish blackness which is the very mask of death, especially in those cases in which the patient has suffered acutely. Well, this one gasped loud enough to bring the walls down, and went through all the contortions of a man with the epilepsy or the plague. It seemed as if all were over with him. But of a sudden—and now consider, if you please, the strangeness of a human mind—he was seized with the drollest and least likely scruple in the world. He begged his wife to bend over him to hear his confession, as he told her, of certain little peccadilloes that lay terribly heavy on his stomach, and he wished to find relief from them. Madame d'Amboise did not need telling twice, and the dying man stammered out the few following words in a voice that had a vault-like hollowness about it already :

“ My dear friend, never does one feel the truth of religion so strongly as when standing on that threshold beyond which lies, no doubt, the revelation of the triple mystery—eternal life, the joys of paradise, and the pains of hell ; so we then seek as much as we can to empty our wallet of that store of sins with which it is sometimes gorged ; well, I have a sin on my conscience, oh, but it is a bad sin . . . a very bad sin . . . and you alone can forgive it me, so I pray you to hear the avowal like a good Christian, that is to say, with the inclination to indulgence and pardon which the Gospel ordains.”

Thereupon Madame d'Amboise replied very piously :

" Say on, my good friend, say on ; in your situation you need fear ill-treatment from no one, least of all from me. What have you to confess to me ? "

" The deuce," said the poor fellow with a groan, " 'tis very smutty."

" Well, but . . . ? "

" Perhaps you will be angry."

" When you are in this state ! Why, 'twould be killing you . . . I hope you think no such thing of me."

" So in the hour of death I may count upon your compassion."

" Just as during your life you have counted on my unalterable affection."

" Well, my dear wife, I have to own to you . . . my God, how hard it is to say ! I have to own to you that I have not always shown the respect I should have done for the solemn bond that unites us. It happened once . . . oh, but only once, I swear ! . . . that I forgot I was your husband. I know not how it happened, but it was at the time when you had gone to see your mother in Touraine ; there was with me a certain Mademoiselle d'Arvilly, to whom you were godmother and I a kind of guardian, as far as I can remember. . . . You were not there, Mademoiselle d'Arvilly was to be married within the year, and I scarcely left the house. What can I say ?

Your absence, the extraordinary curiosity of these little girls of seventeen, especially when they have marriage in sight, the beauty of this one, the promptings of the devil—in fact . . .”

“Enough . . . enough!” said Madame d’Amboise, with a sigh strong enough to uproot an oak-tree. “Ah, we poor women! Yes, that is our lot—to be sacrificed and deceived . . . But no matter, I promised to forgive you, my friend, and I will keep my word. Did that connection last a long while?”

“Alas!” murmured D’Amboise, whose strength was visibly ebbing. “Dare I avow it? Three whole months.”

“Even after I had come back?”

“Ah, good God, yes!”

“Under my very eyes?”

“Under your eyes . . . and yet you saw it none the more for that . . . Oh! it is very bad; I feel that, you may be sure.”

Herewith D’Amboise began to writhe and sob like the repentant Magdalen; after a few moments he resumed:

“My dear wife, it was unworthy and frightful, was it not? And you will find it very hard to relieve me of the immense burden of my remorse.”

Poor Madame d’Amboise, who is kindness itself, was extremely distressed at his despair. She did not see it was a matter to make so much noise over, the more so that she had never believed in the perfect

fidelity of her consort. She had even suspected his intrigue with the little D'Arvilly. So she was really troubled to see that he could not regain his composure, but lamented more and more bitterly, saying his wife would curse his memory, that her forgiveness was not sincere, and a thousand foolish things of the same kind while she tried in vain to bring his mind round. It was heartbreaking to the good woman to see the hapless man end his life in horrible convulsions like one possessed or desperate for the sake of a scruple that might have been called posthumous. So what course did she take? She judged that any means is good to soften the bitterness of a sufferer's last moments, and to get him to die in peace she thought of an expedient that I believe no other woman would have contemplated in her place.

At this point general attention was dexterously renewed by a pause that the speaker introduced between the two halves of his narrative, after which *Ménage* resumed as follows:

"My friend," Madame d'Amboise said to the unhappy sufferer, "do not thus yield to despair, for your tears penetrate my heart; it is madness to make a bogey of so small a matter, and I assure that it is a trifling sin which will not even be mentioned on the day of judgment."

"Do you think so?"

"I am certain of it."

"No, no . . . you say that to calm me."

"If that were so . . . should I be so composed myself?"

"My dear wife, I fail to understand you."

"I will explain more clearly," said Madame d'Amboise with some emotion, "and strange as may seem the avowal which I am about to make, especially from a wife to a husband, I will find courage to tell you everything, hoping by this means to relieve your soul of remorse, which I think you exaggerate in the maddest, most needless manner imaginable."

"Alas, alas!" sighed D'Amboise, "I understand you even less now."

"Your example has wrought upon me," continued the lady, lowering her voice, "and I think that by freeing you from a qualm of conscience which troubles you so much, I shall set my own conscience at rest, so that we may fairly boast, you in the next world and I in this, that we have never kept a secret from one another."

"Merciful heaven!" murmured D'Amboise, "am I part dead already? The more you speak, my dear wife, the less I understand."

"It is time to deliver you from doubt, my dearest husband. So learn . . ."

"So be it!"

"Learn . . ."

"Well?"

"Learn that the infidelity by which you wronged

me was not worth so much trouble and concern, and I have no right to reproach you with it."

"Oh, if that were true, and you could prove it to me," replied the dying man, who seemed to collect himself a little, "I should depart this life in peace . . . and I should bless you."

"You would bless me, whatever were the nature of the revelation I wish to speak of?"

"I swear I would."

"In that case, my dear friend, die in peace, for by some fatality, through an impulse that I can scarcely understand when I think of it, the fact is I myself was led to absolve you of your sin."

"Oh, oh," said D'Amboise, turning round with an effort, "I begin to understand better . . . but, to leave no doubt, could not you, by a few more exact details . . .?"

"Willingly. You remember a journey you took last year into Brittany?"

"Quite well."

"You were absent three months."

"Almost the same time that you passed in Touraine."

"You returned unexpectedly one fine morning. . . . It was scarcely nine o'clock. . . . I left you knocking at the door longer than I should have done, and when you came in you gave way to a fit of temper and said a thousand harsh things that I answered as I could, but did not convince you."

After that you carried your indiscretion beyond all limits, for you raised the coverings of my bed, and, having passed your hands between the sheets, you asserted that two places were warm in the bed instead of one."

"It is true," said the dying man, "it is quite true . . . and upon this remark of mine, which was not so far out, you answered with a great air of candour . . ."

"That I had been sleeping with a girl friend of mine, who was at school at the Convent of the Croix-de-Jésus, and had been obliged to get up early, to be present when the bishop gave benediction . . . I see that you remember all that."

"As if it was still going on, my good friend."

"Well, as I have made up my mind to confess to you, my dear friend, the Convent of the Croix-de-Jésus was invented by me."

"And the girl friend?" asked the sick man with an effort.

"Was a worthy, handsome mousquetaire in M. de Tréville's company," murmured Madame d'Amboise with timid shyness.

The laughter that had been repressed for a quarter of an hour broke out all at once. Men and women alike joined in a concert of pleasantries and jokes such as this subject was likely to inspire among merry guests, who had come, as we had, to the very best place to supper and had it served by a

master-hand. President Tambonneau applauded outrageously. His wife made a show of being overcome, so that she might half fall into Châtillon's arms. M. de Montereul took advantage of the occasion to furtively kiss Madame de V . . . 's shoulder, and I believe I was the only person present who remarked his enterprise, while Ménage held his head high in the moment of triumph. Madame Cornuel, who was at a remote end of the table, exclaimed :

" Poor Madame d'Amboise must be mad. Why, 'twas enough to kill a man in good health."

" No doubt," replied Ménage ; " but just because D'Amboise was sick it cured him. Yes, mesdames, the blow which was calculated to kill him had just the opposite effect, and he got better."

" A second Lazarus !" observed Montereul solemnly.

" It is not possible," said Madame Tambonneau ; for she was not willing to let it seem that her attention was altogether occupied by Châtillon's tender enterprises.

" Possible or not, it is the case," replied Ménage triumphantly. Scarcely had D'Amboise grasped the strange meaning of his wife's revelations, when the colour deepened in his face and his fingers clenched themselves. The very efforts that he made to put a good countenance on it brought about a complete change in his state, and, at the word *mousquetaire* he gave vent to a cry and sat up. What I am telling

you about happened last night. This morning M. Guesnault was summoned to him, examined him lengthily, and said :

“ My dear D’Amboise, since our last interview you have experienced some violent emotion, have you not ? ”

“ Oh, yes, yes,” said the patient, looking askance at his wife.

“ Well, I would bet I could guess it.”

“ You would be clever,” remarked D’Amboise, with such a smile as became his situation.

“ It’s your wife who has brought it all about.”

“ Well, she had a considerable hand in the matter.”

“ She is very lively.”

“ Too lively,” grumbled the husband under his breath.

“ She made you laugh ! ”

“ Yes, quite so, I laughed a great deal, a very great deal,” said D’Amboise with a frightful grimace.

“ That’s what saved you. Your complaint, as I now see, was an abscess of the tonsils, and if it had not been for your wife you would have choked. Kiss her.”

Madame d’Amboise took advantage of the doctor’s order, and thus it happened that he, without knowing it, brought about the reconciliation between husband and wife, which wanted a fillip to carry it through. The kiss was a cold one, but it was enough. It is

plain that everything will now be settled; for D'Amboise is a good sort of a man, and when all is said and done, even if his wife has damaged the bond on a chance occasion, she saved his life, and if a man were not content with such a makeweight as that he would be a brute or an idiot, or a man without a heart.

Everyone agreed with *Ménage*, and the company even got so far as declaring that D'Amboise ought to be sincerely and deeply thankful to his wife; then we passed to other levities.

I will finish my account of the evening at *Tambonneau's* with the relation of a little comedy confined to two characters; it was enacted before us, and the players were the Count and Countess de *Morblanc*. The lady was sitting on my left, and her husband, who had been placed on one side of our hostess, was airing his foppishness and self-conceit, ogling all the women, and from time to time noting his appearance in a magnificent Venetian mirror that shone in front of him, and from which he seemed to seek inspiration.

This Comte de *Morblanc* was of a dubious genealogy and was far from finding acceptance in all quarters. He might be counted among the vainest men the world has ever produced. He had had some exploits of gallantry to his credit in his youth and used to vaunt them as if they had been the most glorious actions on record. His greatest desire was

to be accounted a lady-killer, and though he was much past forty when I saw him at Madame Tam-bonneau's, he was still just as much a creature of gloss and curls as if he had been an exquisite of the first water.

His wife, the countess, was less pretentious than he, and had a certain ready wit. I shall always remember an answer she gave him in an audible and emphatic tone that night; the implication it carried caused the more merriment that it was not altogether without a bearing on the end of the episode between M. d'Amboise and his wife. At that time they had been married ten years, and after Ménage had told his anecdote, the conversation turned upon the *private life* of each of us. It was a sort of rose-water confession, in which each took his part and said his say. Morblanc left all competitors far behind him. He began his glorification in such a loud voice that everyone else was compelled to keep silence, and with a fatuous complacency he enumerated, in spite of his wife being present, the chief incidents of his amorous career.

"Would you believe, gentlemen," cried he, in the full fire of his improvisation, "would you believe that, when all are counted, I alone have wronged nearly a hundred husbands?"

The countess up till then had taken but a slight share in the conversation; she now looked her husband straight in the face, as if she had wished

to throw her words at him, and said, with marvellous composure :

“It is strange, my friend ; for I have never been able to do it to but one.”

Imagine Morblanc's discomfiture. He would have liked to show temper, and, within the space of a minute, turned as pale as plaster and as red as a cock's comb. But our laughter made him swallow his rage, and he quieted down at length. It was the best thing he could do ; for, though the countess's sally was stinging, there was no doubt he had invited it.

We withdrew about two o'clock in the morning, and Madame Tambonneau begged me to consider her house as my own in future. The worthy president made a semblance of echoing the phrase, and I accordingly thanked him and embraced him with great effusion. But I fancied he looked at me askance and with a jealous eye.

Châtillon, who was taking me back to my house in his coach, said to me on that occasion :

“You are a rare traitor ! You sent that salutation to its true address by a very roundabout road.”

“You are wrong to call me a traitor,” I answered without anger. “I know you have your place with our little hostess, but it is a matter of time, and, as I do not seek to arrive at the spot till you have left it, I am taking the longest way about.”

When I had returned I went to bed at once, and in less than a quarter of an hour the dark and silent wings of slumber were stretched over the Hôtel de Roquelaure. I own that after so busy a day I had need of a little repose, and my eyelids were soon heavily closed. But jealous fate had decreed that I was to have no single hour to myself. No sooner was I fairly launched upon the splendid ocean of dreams, when a tempest, accompanied by strange roarings and confused lights, forced me to re-enter harbour. To abandon the figurative style, as not being to my taste (it was the style then used at the Palais de Rozelinde, the most noted place in all the Empire of the Bluestockings), I will say straight out that I was awakened by so loud and sudden a din, that I thought, for a moment, all the devils from hell were dancing a saraband in my courtyard.

I rose and ran to my window, and this was the sight that met my astonished eyes. The groom was dragging the dung-fork out of the stable, the cook was rushing up armed with a spit, and Boquette, my coachman, with his eyes still half shut, was brandishing his whip with a fine air of menace.

The explanation of this levy of my *bucklers* (I beg to be excused for the use of this high-sounding word with reference to a pitchfork, a spit and a whip) was supplied at the same moment by a fourth person, who, perched upon an outhouse abutting on the main building, was gesticulating and bawling out

like one of the damned. It was Monseigneur Bruscombille himself ; he was lying on his belly, and with one hand had clutched the tallest chimney, while with the other he was flourishing a large sabre, with which he was hacking and hewing at whatever was within his reach.

“ Ah, vile wretch ! ” cried he, “ I’ll teach you to come thus and surprise honest folk in their sleep . . . Ah, you desperate robber, you gallows’ bird, you food for crows ! Vile criminal and loafing scoundrel ! ”

At this point Bruscombille turned slightly towards me and continued :

“ Be at your ease, Monsieur le Marquis, I have got one of them by the ear, and may I lose my reputation if I do not haul him up here as if ’twere with the handle of a well-bucket. Now then, you others, come to my help, you see I have got all I can do ! ”

The three other servants, whose limbs were no doubt still heavy with the agreeable warmth of the beds they had been suddenly roused from, made a show of action which scarcely displayed their energy so much as a reasonable modicum of good intentions. They marched straight up to the wall, but as they found the doors fastened, and had not at their disposal those mysterious means which Bruscombille had probably used to clamber upon the roof, they sought in vain to scale the obstacle. The assault failed at every point. In the meanwhile Bruscombille

was shouting in an oppressed voice as of a man who struggles with scantness of breath :

“ Oh ! . . . Oh ! . . . the rascal's getting away from me . . . his ear is slipping out of my clutch . . . he is making off . . . he is running. Take this, you villain, a good slash across the forehead . . . that will mark you for the Provost.”

And with the words he dealt a swashing blow at his retreating foe ; then he suddenly raised himself and apostrophised the hapless cook, who, with Boquette, had but now reached the edge of the roof :

“ Scum that you are,” said he with a magnificence worthy of the heroism he had just displayed, “ of what use is it to look at me with silly faces and an air of fear ? You see that you have come too late.”

In the midst of this strange to-do I had put on a dressing-gown and resolved to make an examination of the scene myself. Bruscombille broke out into an endless plaint about the misfortune he had had in letting the ringleader of the gang escape him, and he explained to me how the vile malfactor, after climbing my garden wall and breaking the inside trellis, had eluded pursuit by climbing on to a roof like a monkey and then leaping into the street a distance of two arms' length.

I listened attentively, but with some distrust to Bruscombille's account, and then asked him :

“ So you were on your guard ? ”

"Monsieur le Marquis," he replied with assurance, "I had my suspicions and I was on the watch."

I let this explanation pass, though it did not completely satisfy me, and promised my honest valet that I would particularly examine into his conduct and give him a reward worthy of his devotion. However, as I thought it urgent to take measures for securing future safety, I begged the Lieutenant-Civil Daubray to come and see me on the following day, that he might draw up a precise account of the incident.

M. Daubray was a man of much shrewdness and sagacity. He questioned everybody without passing a word of comment, and studied the various positions of the scene of conflict in the same silent fashion. After this he took me aside and said :

"Do you wish me to say what I think ?"

"I beg you to do so."

"Your valet Bruscombille is a great rascal."

"I suspected as much," I answered, "and that is why I begged you to come."

"He belongs to the great family of the Tricksters, and I am sure he would play a farce to perfection. Take me to his room. I must examine his things."

Bruscombille appeared strangely annoyed when he saw us enter his room. In fact, he was on the point of running away and seeking a refuge from the storm as far off as possible ; but M. Daubray did not lose sight of him. He kept a tight hold upon him, and, without any apparent use of force,

obliged him to accompany us with those honours that were our due.

The Lieutenant-Civil began by having the mattress opened. Then a splendid shower of gold filled the room.

I thanked M. d'Aubray, who assured me he was quite at my service; next, upon a signal, which I suppose was preconcerted, four halbadiers marched into the house and surrounded Bruscombille, whose lips were white and his fists clenched. But I am sure he was more ashamed at seeing himself thus entrapped than frightened at the terrible account he would have to settle with justice. The jeers of his fellows were certainly his cruellest punishment.

It had all fallen out just as he himself had foretold. My money had been recovered intact, and the thief was taken.

The ensuing night, not knowing how to kill time, I went to play at Lesdiguières', and staked the sum, and, thanks to doing so, reaped nearly the double of it. It was a vein of good luck.

Some time afterwards I learned that Bruscombille, who had not apparently furnished sufficient evidence in the support of his innocence and virtue, was rowing with equal grace and skill in the King's galleys.

CHAPTER XXIII

His Eminence M. de Montauron—A brilliant reception—An idler's plans—Leisure brings counsel—To whom shall I throw the handkerchief?—My choice is quickly made—We find Madame Tambonneau again—*The six faces*—A tear—We open the business—Argus and his hundred eyes—A way of shutting them for him—I pare the lion's talons and make him as meek as a lamb—A husband's friendship—Gallant jousts—The pavanelle—M. d'Ermenonville—An incident—The storm—General retreat—I withstand events—Time to go—The two coaches—The little cruelties of a kind heart—Incalculable consequences of corpulence—An idea—Showing the sublime use a husband may make of his authority—My wager won—I cast a spell over Madame Tambonneau—A lively spirit—A ticklish lady—A burst of laughter—Dangers of a fit of merriment—A model spouse—The lady laughs no more—The woman with two husbands—A little story about M. d'Ermenonville.

SOME time afterwards, M. de Montauron, whom by way of a jest we used to call *His Eminence of Gascony*, because he was a great talker and spent a princely revenue, gave an excellent *fête*, to which Tambonneau and his wife were invited. It is not my intention to deal at length with the incidents of the evening, which were, in fact, uninteresting. But

I am bound to make mention of the occasion, because with it there commenced for me an adventure with the president's wife which took up my attention for nearly six months.

My best friends were not at Montauron's that night, and I was excessively wearied at the entertainment.

"The deuce!" thought I, "as I know not what to do with myself to-day, why should not I make an effort to fall in love? I have been free from every sort of bonds for a month, and nothing is so tedious in the long run as a too absolute liberty . . . I will pass in review all that is good here; I shall be free to see whether my addresses are accepted or rejected; so to the choice!"

Madame Tambonneau was the first on whom my eyes fell, and half because she whetted my appetite, and half to save myself the trouble of seeking further, I thought it as well to stop there. So I took the field, well resolved to give battle and hold my own. They were about to dance *the six faces*; I went to ask her to be my partner, and so arranged matters that I should be able to embrace her when the last turn came. It was as good a way of setting the business afoot as any other. This done, the fiddles played the prelude, and I carried off Madame Tambonneau as lightly as if she had been a feather, and that in the very middle of a sermon with three heads which her husband was administering to her.

Just as we took our stations for the dance I saw a tear that was forming in her eye.

"Ah, what is the matter?" I asked her, lowering my voice. "You are crying, my fair partner."

"I . . ." replied Madame Tambonneau, casting from afar one of those oblique glances which are of a sinister presage at her husband. "I! Crying! What makes you think that?"

"Why, your eyes, where pearls of dew are still gleaming. . . . Besides, why should you deny it? I caught you in the act."

"And then," replied Madame Tambonneau, "you seek to subject me to interrogation in due form of law, as if I were guilty of some great crime?"

"On the contrary; all my delight would be to console you for a persecution against which, I am sure, your innocence should protect you. Tell me your grief . . . do you know any remedy for it? I will seek it for you from Constantinople to Peking!"

"Without going so far, you might render me a service. . . ."

"Name it!"

"Well, it would be to keep Monsieur le Président Tambonneau away from me as much as possible this evening."

"Your husband?"

"Yes."

"He is worrying you?"

"To death."

"But what does he want?"

"He does not know himself. He has his crotchets like that. One day he is pleased with all I do; another day he finds fault with me about everything and nothing, and is never satisfied. To-night we are in bad moods. He is in a crushing humour. Just now he declared I was showing my shoulders a great deal too much . . . A moment afterwards he snatched off my scarf, saying that muffled up in that great flag—'twas the word he used—I looked like a little tradeswoman from the Marais."

"It is true that you are much better as you are, and I approve of his removing the scarf."

"Please do not fix your eyes on me like that, Monsieur de Roquelaure, we are being watched."

"Who is watching?"

"M. Tambonneau."

"Does he distrust me?"

"He detests you."

"Come now! What harm have I done him?"

"None that I know . . . But he has a horror of your name, and is terribly annoyed with M. de Châtillon for having brought you to our house."

"Oh, that surprises me, but it shall not continue. I want to be in M. Tambonneau's good graces."

"It will be difficult."

"And I want to get there no later than this evening."

"I doubt if you can."

"Do you think that? Well . . . I do not mean to appear in the wrong. Within two hours M. Tambonneau must be quite taken with me; I will make myself indispensable to him; he shall not be able to live without me."

"In the meanwhile you are clasping my hand so tightly and pressing so close to me that he is beside himself with anger, and never takes his eyes off us."

"Well, in that case he has his work cut out, for now it is our turn; he will have to exert himself if he does not mean to lose sight of us."

The fiddles gave the cue, and off we went. Madame Tambonneau, light as a butterfly and yielding as an inamorata, accepted with a sweet graciousness all the movements which my arm, sinuously clasped about her waist, suggested to her. Favoured by the pretty turmoil of the dance, I divided my attention between the wife whom I was indoctrinating to the best of my power and the husband whose bent and menacing posture was the drollest piece of seriousness that can be imagined. The worthy fellow was really under the malignant influences of an access of jealousy, and was consuming me with his eyes. I was imperturbable under the heavy fire of that culverin continually poured upon me, and even appeared to be unaware of it. When the *six faces* drew to an end, and at a given moment the *ritournelle* brought each cavalier in face of his partner again, there was a concert of gentle kisses given in time, and falling all at

once, as it were, like a thousand drops of amorous rain on a bed of flowers. My kiss had less sound about it, perhaps, than the others, but I am sure it was longer, more moist and more vigorous. It began upon the shoulder and finished a little lower down ; in fact, my lips, when I withdrew them, just touched the fine lace border upon the bodice of the president's wife. . . . I felt her quiver, and in a tardy way repulse me with her hand . . . and a slight gloom settled on her face, which was usually frank and gay, as I led her back to her place. Tambonneau was awaiting her there, and looked as stiff as a Prussian soldier in front of a sentry-box. I made as if I did not perceive the jealous husband's perturbed face, and to make the comedy yet better I said very loud to his wife, as I brought her to her seat :

"Be so good, madam, as to tell me where M. le Président Tambonneau is, that I may pay my respects to him."

"Here he is," said she, "just in front of you."

"Eh, zookers, M. Tambonneau, I am enchanted to see you. How are loans going? Is finance in a good way? Is business as brisk as ever?"

This torrent of questions, fortified by a hearty shake of the hand, very much surprised the president, who at first could do nothing but stammer two or three syllables scarcely to be understood. Then he bent over towards his wife with a glum air, and was no doubt for resuming his discourse to her at the

point where he had left it. Fortunately, I did not forget the little service Madame Tambonneau had begged of me, and grasping my man by the arm, I said to him :

“Egad, Monsieur Tambonneau, now I have got you, I am not going to let you go. You must do me a kindness . . .”

“Which is . . . ?” said he with a sour manner.

“I will explain it; but to that end I must have your private ear. There are too many listeners here. Will you come with me into the next room ?”

“I am at your service.”

I carried Tambonneau off in triumph, while his wife, thus freed for a few minutes, thanked me with a glance; yet I thought she still doubted whether I could make her husband abandon his aversion to me. And then began the drollest conversation between us, but carried on in the most solemn fashion in the world. What did I talk to him about, or what did I not talk to him about? Seeing that he suspected me of some designs upon his wife, I began by telling him it was my intention to marry shortly, and that I wished to have his opinion upon the subject. To give this tale a greater air of probability, I pointed out a certain Mademoiselle de Lignan among the throng, about whom I had never even thought before, I beg you to believe, but who at the moment seemed to me very fit for the part which I made her play unconsciously. “I

have not yet made my declaration," said I to Tam-bonneau, "and I shall not do so unless you advise it. Never be surprised that I have chosen you among so many to ask such a piece of counsel of. The reason for it is very simple. Everyone knows that you have a lucky way with women, and your own marriage has the reputation of being one of the happiest and best assorted in France. Well, luck has not so much to do with a thing of this sort as they say, and my own view is that to succeed in the game you must have the sagacity and trained judgment of a skilled man. That is the chief ground for my referring to you, and I hope you will not take it in ill part." Tambonneau raised his head in pride, and his vanity was deeply flattered by so striking a display of confidence. Then what I had foreseen happened. He completely adopted my views, strongly approved of my project of marrying, and strutted like a peacock while he set forth his own felicity; indeed, the bliss accruing to him from his union with Mademoiselle Boyer seemed to get into his head as he recounted it. He even advised me, if I was not so deeply involved with the little De Lignan as to be unable to withdraw, to hold off a few days, for he could tell me of someone who would suit me much better. To which I replied that, on the one hand, I did not consider myself irrevocably bound, and, on the other hand, even had this been so, the pleasure of getting my

spouse from his hands would have been enough to make me trample upon considerations which, after all, were but secondary when the happiness of a man's whole life was concerned. He regarded my sentiments as those of a prudent and well-advised man, and assured me that I should never have reason to repent of having placed myself in his hands. I then left this subject and commenced another, and spoke at length with him about his relations with the court and his famous loan enterprise, a thing which interested him more than aught else, not even excepting his wife. So he continued to exhaust his breath upon the subject of finances. But I had a last means in reserve for the conquest of him. I drew him, in spite of his resistance—for he was very miserly—to a card-table, and there, playing exclusively for my own hand, I managed so well, or, to put it better, I deliberately played so badly, that in half an hour I made him the richer by seven or eight hundred pistoles. Delight at having pocketed my money put Tambonneau beside himself. He hummed, he laughed aloud, and even carried off a jest at my expense two or three distinct times.

He was no longer the same man.

When we reappeared amid the company, his wife seemed anxious at our absence, and was talking to one of the ladies around her with a preoccupied air. Her face, as soon as she caught sight of us arm in

arm, displayed a simple surprise, of which I alone grasped the true meaning. Places were being taken for a *pavanelle*, and so complete was the metamorphosis of Tambonneau that he insisted I should be his wife's partner. She could not get over it, she wanted to know the causes of the change, but I advised her to talk to me as little as possible lest she should arouse in our jealous worthy's mind the distrust I had quieted. But she could not altogether restrain her tongue, and murmured, hiding her face with her fan :

" 'Tis a very miracle ; are you a sorcerer ? "

" Yes, sometimes, but we shall carry it further than this."

" It seems to me," said Madame Tambonneau, who began to be singularly pleased with the sport, " it seems to me that a great deal has already been done for this once."

" It is not enough."

" Nay, but what more can you want ? "

" If I told you, you might put yourself on your guard, and I want to take you by surprise."

" Do not talk so loud . . . he will hear you."

" Never fear ; I am going to make a perfect husband of Tambonneau ; I have already found the means to make him blind ; he will be deaf soon."

" Be quiet, be quiet, sir," said the president's wife, putting on a look that was meant to be very

severe, but fell short of being so, "you are telling me things . . ."

"That ought to be but half-discerned and guessed at . . . you are right, and without telling you that I love you, I shall try in the future to prove it . . . will that be to your mind?"

"I have no answer for a perfect demon, and 'tis plain that you are one that has escaped. Tambonneau is so easy as to make friends with you . . . well, it is my turn now to detest you and hate you. Come, sir, 'tis now for you to *chasser* . . . to the right . . . the chain, please . . . now we turn . . . How badly we are dancing, they will be making fun of us."

I reassured Madame Tambonneau as to this fancied danger by making her go through the last figures of the *pavanelle* with equal agility and precision. When we came to the general round, knowing that Châtillon was no longer in possession, for he had been on active service for more than six months, I thought it well to act upon the old proverb which tells us to strike the iron while it is hot, and I asked her without more ado for a tryst.

My boldness amused her more than it annoyed her in reality. So she answered me with a smile that was full of provocation :

"A tryst! It will not happen soon."

"We shall see."

"Do you think I should give you the favour of a *tête-à-tête*."

"Why not?"

"Well, I would not swear it would not happen in a few years."

"A long time to wait."

"Do you think it would happen sooner?"

"Perhaps to-night."

Madame Tambonneau snatched her hand quickly from mine, and hurried back to resume possession of her seat, behind which the president was standing, chattering to an absurd personage whom we frequently saw at the Palais-Royal, but of whom I have not before had occasion to speak, the fat Monsieur d'Ermenonville. The president's little lady was no longer in her usual frame of mind. She appeared neither sad nor gay, but her face displayed a mixture of anxiety and fear which showed that she was much preoccupied. However, I thought I could augur that this mood was not unfavourable to my plans. To carry out the system I had adopted with her thoroughly, I went and sought another seat, so that I might sit near her . . . but fate decreed that chance should do more in this conjuncture than all the finest stratagems and plots in the world. An incident that nobody could have foreseen suddenly interrupted the course of M. de Montauron's fête, but we, who were in one of the central rooms of his house, passed some time without knowing what was the cause of the general yet confused movement that we perceived from a distance in a long gallery which faced us.

Women were hurrying from the place, in spite of the efforts of the men to retain them. I questioned Miossens to find out the meaning of all this noise.

“Do you not hear the storm?” said he. A bolt has fallen on the roof of the kitchens, and carried away the cornice. I am going to make sure that there is no danger of a fire.”

I went to a window, and having drawn the curtain, gazed forth upon a sight which was at once splendid and appalling. It was an autumn night. The warm and moist vapours that a south wind had brought over the town had gathered into black hills of cloud, and these were at every instant riven by huge lightning flashes. How charming is that indifference which pleasure brings in its train! Had it not been for the thunderbolt—and only the servants had heard it, for it was they who had given the alarm—we should not have perceived, I fancy, that the air was alive with flame and the rain was pouring down in torrents.

Montauron did all he could to keep his company together, but they were flying in disorder, and his efforts were almost vain. The frightened flock had given the signal to scatter, and in spite of Miossens' assurances that the danger they feared was at an end, it looked as if they would leave the fiddles to scrape in a void place.

I did not lose my head in the midst of this turmoil, and disregarding what gossiping tongues

might say, I kept close to Madame Tambonneau's heels; in my thoughts she seemed like a living statue, illumined by the sun of love, and I had become her shadow. As for Tambonneau, he was so taken up with old d'Ermenonville, who was proposing a stroke of business to him that was entirely to his liking, that he had scarcely taken notice of the incident of which everyone about him was talking. His wife would not avow so much to herself, but she was annoyed that circumstances would now break off, for a longer or shorter time, the thread of an intrigue that had been so feattly set on foot; but she forced herself to put a good face on it, and pretended to be charmed at what had happened.

"The heavens are punishing you for your presumption," she said to me in a low voice. "I am on the point of withdrawing."

"And you are pleased?"

"Well, you will leave me at peace for a little."

"That's as it may be . . ."

"Why, what can you do?"

"Suppose I leave with you."

"Oh! 'tis scarce possible; you have your coach and we ours. So you will get no further, at least, until to-morrow."

"The deuce take it!" exclaimed I, scratching my forehead.

"Well, my Lord Presumptuous, what has become of all your superb assurance? A *tête-à-tête*

. . . to-night, you said! I begin to think your watch is rather fast."

"Wait and see; the night is not over yet."

During this brief conversation the throng continued to file away, with the exception of some of Montauron's intimates, whom he had, so to say, shut up in his own room; and the house was almost empty. M. d'Ermenonville pointed this out to Tambonneau, who, passing from one extreme to another, began to make immoderate haste, saying he had been wrong to stay so late, that the morrow would be a pay day, and that he would only have time to sleep an hour or two at the outside.

His wife got herself ready to go with remarkable quickness. Her husband cast a hood over her head and a cloak over her shoulders, and then all four of us went down without even allowing ourselves time to take leave of Montauron.

The wind was lashing the windows of the hall vehemently, and the worthy d'Ermenonville, who included among his other whims that of going afoot at night, cried:

"Mercy upon me! I have neither coach nor chair!"

Madame Tambonneau had determined to torment me with pin-pricks, while she affected an indifference which the tone of her voice and her gleaming eyes did their best to belie. Following

up her tactics, which were such as would only have deceived an indifferent observer or a husband—who is ordinarily callous about these tricks of detail—she replied, quickly enough to get beforehand with everybody else :

“M. de Roquelaure will not be so cruel as to let our good M. d’Ermenonville set out afoot in such weather. . . . I know he will offer him the place he has to spare.”

Our coaches were, in fact, only for two persons. M. d’Ermenonville was already declaring his satisfaction at this notion, and Madame Tambonneau had shot a sly, mocking glance at me about the delicious *tête-à-tête* she was arranging for me, when her excellent husband interposed with authority, and, raising his voice as if he were fulfilling his office of comptroller in court, he cried :

“No, no; our good friend Roquelaure will forgive me for opposing that arrangement, which appears natural enough at a first consideration . . . but this infernal storm has surprised d’Ermenonville and me in the midst of a conversation that it would be dangerous to break off. There is a matter of two or three millions to be made, and that is something worth putting oneself about for. We must sit three in our coach, that’s all.”

“As you please,” said I to Tambonneau, “but let us make haste, for the rain reaches us here, and I judge by the vividness of the lightning that we

have not had the worst of the storm yet. Pray proceed ahead of me, for I shall not be at ease till I see that you have put off."

" 'Put off,' is the word," muttered the president, while he helped his wife across a runnel that had become a lake. "Come, 'tis your turn, d'Ermenonville, get in. . . ."

"Good-night," cried Madame Tambonneau to me from the back of the carriage, and I thought there was less raillery in her voice now that she felt all the dignified weight of M. d'Ermenonville pressing upon one of her hips.

On a sudden, Tambonneau, who had squeezed himself into the coach as the third person, got out again in a passion, swearing.

"What's the matter?" asked d'Ermenonville, stretching out his head.

"The matter . . . the matter . . . is, my friend, that you are a desperately fat man, and the coach will never hold the three of us."

"What is to be done?" asked Madame Tambonneau.

"We must go back to our first notion," said d'Ermenonville.

"There is a way out of it," I ventured, seeming to address myself particularly to Tambonneau.

"Say it at once, my good friend, for I am drenched."

"Madame Tambonneau could come into my coach."

"Why, of course . . . and to fancy we never thought of it ! . . . Get out, Madame Tambonneau."

"But, my dear . . ."

"Get out !" repeated her husband, whom the rain rendered impatient.

"But I think . . ."

"What a deal of pother !"

"But listen . . . do you not see . . . ?"

"I understand your objections perfectly. All that they lack is common sense."

"Oh, well, as you wish it !"

"I wish it."

Madame Tambonneau ceased to protest. Was not obedience her prime duty, and was it for her to show herself more anxious about her honour than her husband himself? In a minute, with a couple of springs, she was in my carriage and I close to her. Tambonneau, who now felt at his ease beside his fat friend, thrust his head out at the window and cried :

"You will forgive me, will you not, Roquelaure, for being so free and easy with you ?"

"Of course I will forgive you."

"Well, it's a long way from here to our house, and you will be obliged to come all the way to our door . . ."

"Am I not master of my actions and my time? Be at your ease, and let us start."

The coachmen whipped up their horses, and I shivered with delight at thinking how far the Marais,

where Montauron then lived, was from the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, where Tambonneau had taken up his quarters for the time close to the Hôtel de Beauvau.

My first words were these :

“ He wished it.”

“ ’Tis incredible ! ”

“ My fair friend, do you call this a *tête-à-tête*, and is it not still night ? Remember, I had wagered it should be so ! ”

“ A rare merit ! You had taken your measures beforehand.”

“ So then it was I who brought on the rain, I who started the thunderstorm, and I who gave d’Ermenonville his corpulence, from which some good will result this once in his life. Well, I accept these superhuman honours ; and now, since the stars obey me and nature is at my orders, I am going to turn all my batteries upon you and cast a spell upon you.”

“ To bewitch me . . . ’twould be of a piece with the rest . . . and what would be the good of it ? ”

“ To make you pliant to my entreaties. And thus I provide for lulling asleep the tendency to resistance which is natural to you and every woman of good birth. . . . Do you feel the charm acting already ? ”

The rain that had fallen on her hands had made them very cold, and while I spoke I warmed them

by pressing both in one of mine, and I drew her gradually towards me.

"Oh, *Monsieur le Sorcier*, you are abusing your power. . . . What can my little fingers do against your hand? It would crush them if they tried to move."

"Let them remain, and the harsh compulsion changes, as if by enchantment, to a sweet caress!"

"More sorcery," murmured the president's wife with a smothered laugh.

"Try it."

"Well, what danger is there in letting you take my hand? . . . Here it is."

I raised it swiftly and carried it to my lips. The contrast was that of a hot iron upon the cold, smooth surface of marble. . . . She checked me and said:

"Listen . . . what voices are those that we hear?"

"Egad, your husband's and Monsieur d'Ermenonville's."

"Where are they, in front or behind?"

"Almost alongside of us . . . we are sailing in company."

"Oh, move away from me . . . I beg you, Monsieur de Roquelaure, you are much too close . . . very much too close . . . just think . . . the horses are not going very fast. . . . If Tambonneau took suspicions into his head . . . if he were to see us!"

"Dear lady," I replied, bending over to her ear,

"do you take your husband for a cat ? I proved to you just now that he could not see if he had five hundred candles, and now you will have it he can see in the dark."

"Certainly the sky is very murky."

"Black as ebony . . . and 'tis as simple as can be . . . my magic circles were traced in that intention ; if moonlight had been necessary to me, I should have adopted quite a different method."

"Ah, moonlight would have been prettier."

"But not so safe. . . ."

"And if I besought you to make it shine upon us, would your powers attain to that ? "

"I doubt it, for after the many tasks I have just exacted from my familiar sprites, the only power I have reserved for myself is that of making you love me."

"And you think you will succeed ? "

"To a man of spirit nothing is impossible."

I had a wizard's reputation to maintain, so I behaved as became the part. As she had said, I abused a certain muscular vigour which sometimes is not to be despised. I threw her little supple and fragile form half back above me, and she yielded with a charming pliability. Up till now all had passed in silence, but one of my hands touched her arm, and she suddenly sat up again and exclaimed :

"Ah, you are tickling me !"

I sought to free my hand, but the remedy was worse than the complaint. It seems that this time I glided over yet more sensitive places than at first, and one of those fits of nervous laughter, which are peculiar to her sex, seized her ; they sometimes commence without a reason and come to an end without one.

"Do not laugh so," I said to her in a low voice, "or I shall think you are making fun of me."

I thought I could discern that her access of hilarity was about to cease. Unluckily, another voice, proceeding from the darkness and slightly hoarse, as if with a cold, repeated, word for word, what I had said. It was the president who spoke. His coach was now exactly on a level with mine.

"Do not laugh so, Madame Tambonneau," he said in a fatherly tone.

"You see," I resumed in a whisper too soft to be heard, "you see he always thinks as I do."

The phrase was a calamity, for my reflection struck her as comical, and she laughed louder than ever.

"Madame Tambonneau," repeated the president, in a less amiable tone, but without showing his nose outside, for it was raining harder than ever, "be calm, or you will choke."

This was pouring oil on the fire, and the access continued.

"My dear Roquelaure," cried Tambonneau in a

beseeking voice, "find some way to prevent my wife laughing . . . and you will render me a service."

"I will do my best," I answered.

And thereupon I set to work.

It was not easy. The excitement of her nerves had given Madame Tambonneau an increase of energy against which I found I had to strive. However, as one crisis usually brings on another, weakness soon had its turn, and leaving neither my arms nor my knees out of action, I managed to surround her with so many bonds and bars that it became impossible for her to attempt a movement. I held her prisoner, and as the stress acted on her mind as well as on her body, I felt her yielding to my continued effort and giving me my way completely. She was still laughing, but the fits were fewer and almost plaintive, losing their violence by degrees, and seemed about to come to an end.

Suddenly the president's voice, loud with wrath, sounded forth like the explosion of a shell amidst the flashes of lightning and the roll of the thunder.

"Madame Tambonneau," cried he in a tone of authority, "I order you, do you hear, I order you to be quiet."

Her husband was getting angry . . . it was growing serious. At the risk of stifling her, I pressed Madame Tambonneau to me, and closed her lips . . . with mine. . . . What else was to be done? Nothing. At first I had some scruples, but the

necessity of satisfying the president made me abandon them. A man must know how to sacrifice his own feelings.

I cannot tell whether it would have been possible to find a better means of bringing her to silence, but it was plain that mine was not a bad one. The rain continued to fall in torrents, the wind blew hard against the windows, and our two carriages rolled on at equal speed. Madame Tambonneau was laughing no longer.

Monsieur Tambonneau, delighted at the majestic silence which reigned in our coach, said solemnly to Monsieur d'Ermenonville :

"Well, what did I tell you? With a woman there is nothing like being stern at the right moment. You see . . . tractable and good as a child . . . That is how I have moulded her."

* * * * *

The following week I bought a small house at Saint-Germain, and here I entertained Tambonneau and his charming wife as long as they were willing to remain. I have been assured that they used to laugh over it in the town, and say we were her two husbands.

As I have mentioned the name of Monsieur d'Ermenonville, I will here find place for a short anecdote which amused the court for awhile.

Much company had assembled at the Louvre for a reception which was to be given there to the Am-

bassador of Portugal. I went as usual, and in spite of the occasion being so formal, I made the poor man the butt of the following jest.

Everybody was acquainted with one of M. d'Ermenonville's whims, which was that he would say to everybody whom he greeted, "I kiss your hands."

I had just entered the apartment where the reception was to take place, and a quick glance had assured me that the Queen-Regent had not yet come in; only Messieurs de Conti and de Longueville were there. On the threshold of the door I had run against M. de Condé, who, scarcely replying to the endless salutations of M. d'Ermenonville, seemed to be slipping quietly away to his own apartments.

About a quarter of an hour elapsed, and at the end of that time M. le Prince de Conti, looking to right and left and not discerning the person he sought, asked in a low voice:

"Where is my brother De Condé?"

Nobody made answer. The worthy d'Ermenonville was about two paces away from me; he raised himself on tiptoe to show his zeal and appeared to be seeking the prince and his escort among the crowd with his glances.

A facetious idea came into my head. I drew near to M. de Conti and replied to his question, keeping my countenance as well as I could:

"His highness will soon return, Monseigneur.

He has gone to wash his hands, which M. d'Ermenonville had just kissed."

Never had a phrase uttered with simplicity produced so general an effect. The excellent d'Ermenonville knew not where to look, and I saw that he was inclined to show temper. That absurd inclination was luckily lost in the flow of laughter which spread in an instant throughout the entire company, and the hero of my harmless satire had the good sense to join in it.

The laughter only ceased when Anne of Austria had taken her place on the throne, and in the silence which etiquette demanded the name of M. l'Ambassadeur de Portugal was proclaimed.

CHAPTER XXIV

The French way—Incurable frivolity—A maid of honour—A difficult post at court—An event which could hardly be called one—A mysterious pregnancy—General emotion—Portrait of the heroine of the hour—Interview between the Queen and the Prince—Conjectures—Each man says his say—The Prince's address—An inquiry into the paternity—I am chosen representative—A sleepless night—I lose my gaiety—Am I seriously in love?—My anxiety aroused—A succession of visits—The indiscretions of the Comte de Vardes—Navailles asks a service of me—The Chevalier d'Albret—Young D'Olonville—The question grows more and more obscure—Whose is the child?—I get my gaiety back—My visit to Mademoiselle Blanche de Neuville—A glance at her chamber-maid—An awkward explanation—I am very ill received—The virtue of an unmarried mother—I am turned out—My wrath—On whom is it to fall?—I plan a vengeance proportionate to the offence—The situation suddenly changes—A love-letter—Shall I go to the rendezvous?

HOWEVER much a man may turn his attention to great affairs, little matters will exact attention in the course of life from day to day, and it is surprising to see how, in the very midst of public calamities, a certain tendency to levity will glide in, especially among the French. Never had anxiety been keener at the court, and the division which was showing itself within the camp was in no way reassuring for the future. Men spoke beneath their breath of the scarcely

credible intrigues that M. de Conti was openly promoting, and M. de Larochefoucauld was publicly giving utterance to seditious and incendiary aspirations in honour of Madame de Longueville. The rebellious townsmen seemed to have but half-sheathed their weapons, and the markets were like lobbies of the Parlement; men were working and struggling in the dark, and, in a word, things were going from bad to worse. And yet, who would believe it? one fine morning all these great interests whereon depended the very existence of the kingdom were forgotten, questions of defeat or victory, of degradation or honour, of life or death, were left on one side at the moment when they were most vital, and everyone began to enquire . . . about what? A slight accident due to one of those chances which ought to make the little god Cupid's conscience so heavy. It concerned one of the Queen's maids of honour, Mademoiselle Blanche-Renée-Victoire d'Agots de Neuville, whose father, if I am not mistaken, had died at Charenton at the time of the last national synod.

At first it was but a little rumour; but soon it grew into a storm. And this can easily be understood.

A sin concealed is not only assured of pardon, but it has all the glamour of a mystery and that peculiar attraction which ever attaches to the unknown. Sometimes it happens that the great secret is everybody's secret, yet each one thinks he alone

has guessed it, and in this case we are so satisfied with our perspicacity and so proud of our insight that we are inclined to be indulgent. So true is this, that we may often see how scrupulous minds will lend the ægis of toleration and discreteness to clandestine lovers. But no sooner is the veil lifted and the story noised abroad than this hireling generosity is at an end. Virtue, which is open to treaty within four walls, shows itself like a tigress in public. When a man is alone it may interest him to mark the capricious movements of a spark that dances over the earth as a star would; but if a throng is there, the spark is carried aloft by overmuch breath, and it falls, no one knows where, at haphazard and as the wind decrees. Then should a man beware of the evil suggestions, which are all around us like so many haystacks ready to catch fire! The light increases . . . the conflagration bursts forth . . . and all the world cries "Fire!"

Now this was just what happened to Mademoiselle de Neuville. Nothing positive was known about her conduct, but some irregularities were suspected and some intrigues were scented. Yet so clever was she accounted in misleading those who pried, and she had managed to disarm slander with so much address by the fear which her ready wit and quick responses inspired, that she had at length been left at peace, though the excessive reserve of her outward demeanour, ill according with the tokens

of a vivacious and fiery temperament, was just adapted to excite certain efforts which are more difficult to repress than is supposed; I mean those of the guessers of riddles and the boudoir astrologers.

But this complete calm could not last for ever. A life that is too regular is to be mistrusted like a sea that is too calm; it is impossible that there should not be, sooner or later, some little storm or other, heralded by warning lightning. In this case there was not so much ceremony. It began with a thunderclap.

It was midday, and I had just entered the Palais-Royal to make my obeisance to the Queen when I was stopped by Bautru, who summoned me mysteriously by one of those meaning gestures that cannot be conveyed upon paper. He led me into an apartment adjoining the guardroom, where I found eight or ten gentlemen assembled who might have been taken for conspirators in conclave, for their communications were in whispers, and they muffled their laughter.

"Gentlemen," said Bautru, leading me up by the hand, "we said just now that we felt the want of Roquelaure, and here he is! . . . No doubt the Almighty has sent him."

"For the love of heaven!" exclaimed the Abbé de Cérisy, sanctimoniously, "never put the Almighty in such bad company. Say the devil, that is quite enough."

"Well then, the devil," said Bautru. "I am not a man to quibble about trifles."

I made a pretence of anger, and cried to the abbé. "Take care, my worthy friend, if you make me angry in this world, I will have my revenge on you in hell."

"We have travelled a great distance," resumed Bautru; "let us get back to earth. Roquelaure, great matters are in the wind."

"What are they?"

"Something greater than usual," added Grammont.

"Is the suffragan dead?"

"Not altogether so."

"Have they burned Groisel?"

"Not exactly that . . . the person concerned is Mademoiselle de Neuville."

"A pretty creature."

"Too pretty, alas! . . . for a maid of honour to the Queen-Regent."

"At court 'tis a ticklish post."

"So ticklish that she has been overcome while she held it."

"How do they know that?"

"They do not exactly know it," said Navailles.

"They see it."

No explanation could have been clearer. It promised to be a highly interesting matter, so I drew nearer to the others with an increased eagerness, and murmured:

"Unless I am mistaken, 'tis one of those crimes

that are never committed but by couples. Is the accomplice known?"

"Not yet, but he is being looked for."

The answer came from Grammont. Bautru continued, pointing to the gallery which led to the private apartments of Anne of Austria:

"The culprit is there, within forty paces' distance of us, closeted with the Queen, who said yesterday that she would know how to wrest her secret from her. It seems that Her Majesty was not jesting."

"Zounds!" cried I, "here is a rare taking! Is it really such a great offence to . . ."

I stopped short lest I should scandalise the Abbé de Cérisy, who made a pretence of stopping his ears; then I turned to Bautru and said:

"After all, what can they do to her?"

"Send her to the Reformed Maids' . . ."

"But suppose she is neither a maid nor reformed?"

"They will put her in durance, like many who resemble her, with the *Feuillantines* . . ."

At the word *Feuillantines* all those present, being already inclined to laugh, started together upon a certain jovial song that had been popular in Paris for some time, having a rather free refrain with an allusion to this unlucky convent. The song had been composed by the Abbé de Laffemas upon the affair of Madame Lescalopier, whom her husband, the Président aux Enquêtes, and her brother-in-law by mar-

riage, the Comte de Charost, had got immured by means of a decree of the Council delivered in due form in consequence of her amour with Vassé. But on a sudden we were all put out of countenance in the midst of our excursion into melody; for the doors of the Queen's apartment were thrown open, and we lengthened our faces with what speed we might when we saw Her Majesty advancing towards us leaning upon the arm of the heroine of the hour, Mademoiselle Blanche de Neuville. We ranged ourselves in two lines so as to form a passage. Guitaut, taken by surprise, nearly lost his head, and began turning round and round like a madman, going to right and left to form the guard up for the Queen to pass through them, and calling the men by their names. The poor old captain was so taken aback at seeing Anne of Austria leave her apartments without giving him notice that he was muttering incoherent exclamations and could scarcely hold his sword. At last a kind of escort was formed, and the Queen, who had scarcely observed these details, passed through the midst of us, and saluted us with her usual graciousness. Mademoiselle de Neuville several times raised her eyes, but always lowered them again so swiftly as to betray her embarrassment.

As I had no need to make a study of her face, which I knew to the life, I took a long look at her figure, and it was now a great way out of resemblance to the shape of the novices in con-

vents. How strange are the movements of the human mind! I think that for about a week I had paid my court to Mademoiselle de Neuville. Led away by her beauty and her grace, I had been somewhere about the tenth, I think, of her suitors, but I had nothing to reproach her with save that she had rejected my homage, or, rather, had not taken it seriously. Certainly that was no great misdeed, and no one was more pledged than I to recognise freedom of taste in love, and yet at the sight of her I experienced a strange feeling of hatred and jealousy. Jealousy of whom? Why should I be envious or vexed? It is beyond my power to say. All I know is that, without tracing the commencements of the event and without ascertaining what the innocent and delicate subject of all these rumours might have committed, I began by way of precaution and as it were to satisfy a stifled anger in me to give the heartiest maledictions to the man who had been lucky enough to capture so fine a quarry and carry a breach in such well-fortified virtue.

Never had Mademoiselle Blanche de Neuville seemed to me so ravishingly fair and simple. Considering the position in which she was, that word may seem silly, but I could choose no other which would so well convey the extreme effect produced upon me. Anne of Austria's lustre was dimmed by hers, and had it not been for Her Majesty's costume,

which, as a daughter of the Escorial, she ever made conformable to the sumptuary laws of etiquette, a foreigner might have hesitated before saying which was the Queen. I think, in allowing myself this comparison, I do Her Majesty no wrong. Mademoiselle de Neuville had that majesty and distinction which would have become a crown, and in any land where the sceptre had descended in right of beauty she might well have won a throne. She had a Grecian profile, an aquiline nose, an easy and dignified manner, and, in a word, all that commanding graciousness which only the frequenting of a court can bestow. In her eyes were united the fire of quick and lambent wit and the flame of ardent and deep passion. She had the Frenchwoman's subtle smile, the Spanish woman's proud expression, and the veiled lustre of the Italian woman's glances. She had . . . what had she not? But, egad, she is carrying me away. What a picture have I given! How have I lavished my tints! A man might swear that I was the hero of the adventure which was puzzling so many minds.

Well, Queen and subject passed before us, outvying one another in brilliancy and distinction. They proceeded to the end of the long gallery, and our eyes followed them. Then, as well as I could judge by a confused movement I discerned, they separated, and the Queen-Regent, opportunely meeting the Prince, walked with him on the terrace, where she customarily walked every morning about midday.

Mademoiselle de Neuville's appearance at the very time when she was the subject of so lively and animated a conversation had almost the effect of an interlude in the midst of a comedy. The threads of the dialogue, severed for an instant, were knitted up more briskly than ever when she was gone, and the interest we took in her became more real and more thorough.

"I would never have believed it!" I cried with a sort of despair which evoked no tenderness in my excellent friends, but seemed, on the contrary, to provoke their mirth.

"The poor lad will never believe in anybody's virtue again!" cried Bautru. "What a pity!"

"He is turning pale," added Grammont.

"Roquelaure," said the Abbé de Cérisy, feigning to come to my assistance, "are we going to faint?"

"Nay, never weep, I pray you," Bautru recommenced in a tone of condolence.

"Perhaps you thought of marrying her?" said Grammont. "What should prevent you? Would it be such a pity if the child were not so ill-featured, ill-favoured as yourself? Why, half your work is done for you. What have you to complain of?"

And Grammont crowned his speech with a loud burst of laughter. As for me, I neither laughed nor wept, but furtively remarked the faces of those who did not speak. De Vardes hummed, beating time with his fingers; Navailles bit his lips while he care-

fully examined the frescoes on the ceiling ; and the Chevalier d'Albret pretended to be absorbed in a study of the fit of his short, embroidered mantle with a collar of Geneva lace, as it appeared in the mirror. There was an embarrassed, an assumed look on their faces which seemed to reveal more than they wished to let appear. Carrying my scrutiny further, my eyes fell upon the Comte d'Olonville, a young gentleman of the kind we called *new landed*, because they were fresh to the court. His attitude at this conjuncture was worthy of attention ; for at the time of his first admission to the *cercle du soir* he had shown himself so attentive to our heroine that we had by one consent named him *Mademoiselle de Neuville's swain*. So he was the man that I passed in review the last of all.

He was sitting in a corner, deep in a feverish meditation, his gaze fixed in one of those vague regards that include everything but distinguish nothing.

When I had made these observations I had made no headway, 'tis true, but I was pleased to have collected the materials for a fine scaffolding of suppositions and conjectures which might, assuredly, lead me to a discovery of the facts. Every age shares the passion for building a house of cards. All this did not prevent me from making answer to those wits whose fire I had just received.

“ You say I am pale and look as if I were sorry !

Gadswings, gentlemen, I am not concerned. . . . My grief is for this poor lady . . . for having saddled herself, perhaps, with one of you, and, as a consequence, made so bad a choice."

"Roquelaure! Roquelaure!" said Grammont. "You trespass on our liking for you, and we shall take it ill."

"You must forgive him," said the Abbé, toying with his little bands. "You know, Grammont, that our dear Roquelaure is as much at home in exaggerations as a cherry in brandy."

"And you, Abbé, as much at home in religion as a cucumber in vinegar."

"Silence, gentlemen," broke in Navailles opportunely. "The Queen has retired to her oratory, and M. le Prince is approaching us."

All our pleasantries ceased, and a sort of sudden gravity settled upon us, which was both austere and formal. The nearer the Prince came the stiffer became our manner and the more respectful our mien. His Highness made us understand by a gesture that he had something to tell us, and in the twinkling of an eye we had formed a semi-circle around him, like that which is generally formed about the chair of a professor. When the Prince saw us so ready to hear him, he commenced thus:

"Gentlemen, I have no need to remind you of the scandal which has now for a week past been the chief rumour of the court. You all know what

it concerns. A damsel of high birth, whose father held high posts in the Pays d'Aunis and whose grandfather distinguished himself under Henry IV. on the fields of Arques and Ivry, Mademoiselle de Neuville, in fact, has fallen a victim to one of those slips which, according to the circumstances wherein they happen, are to be accounted as simple accidents or irreparable disasters. I have not the talents proper to a bishop, and I am sure you will not suppose in me the absurd pretensions of delivering a sermon about it. In the first place, I should succeed badly in it, and in the next place, I should, no doubt, fail to edify you. So I prefer to tell you frankly and plainly what has been done and what remains to be done. Then we shall all be more at our ease and—no contemptible advantage—we shall finish the sooner.”

The Prince took a breathing-space, and we took advantage of the interval to cough, sneeze and clear our throats, a childish procedure to all appearance, but really of value in a conversation in which respect and prudence debar those addressed from intercalating one single word.

His Highness continued :

“ The position is free from the defect of obscurity. Mademoiselle de Neuville is pregnant —’tis the word — and all that the child wants is a father. Gentlemen, I have resolved to give it one.”

A slight shock passed through the company, and I

thought I could perceive some little furtive glances passing which were more malicious than direct.

“Understand me, gentlemen, so far as possible, I would have this father to be the child’s own. Well, the Queen exhausted all her efforts just now in arguments, entreaties and every kind of incitement with Mademoiselle de Neuville^{te} to gain her secret from her, I mean the name of her seducer. It was all in vain; for she revealed nothing. Nay, I own she was very much wrought upon, and wept bitterly, I must do her that justice. What was to be done after this? The Queen was much embarrassed . . . so I proposed to Her Majesty that I should undertake the settlement of this unhappy matter; my offer was accepted, and you know what I have decided. ’Tis beyond question that Mademoiselle de Neuville^{te} made her choice among the gentlemen of the court. She is not one of those girls without proper feeling who so far forget themselves as to become enamoured of a lackey or a mean varlet. So I would wager a thousand ducats to a crown that her accomplice is not far from here. Be candid, gentlemen, the man we seek is one of you.”

The Prince had a way of saying things which scarce left it open to reply, and his tones showed a certainty, especially in the last words, which was well calculated to put the culprit out of countenance if he were really in our midst. So a murmur arose here and there which was neither consenting nor

dissenting, and brought nothing definite to the listener's ear but some exclamations of surprise, the good faith of which I own that I did not so much as suspect. His Royal Highness did not wait till this protest should have had time to take the form of clear and precise answers; he resumed almost immediately:

"Be at your ease, gentlemen; I have no intention to strain any man's conscience; still less would I be the cause of the ill-timed notoriety which would result from an explanation given here, in the presence of too many witnesses. I ask you for a confidence—I might almost say a confession. So I leave you the whole night for reflection. The *mishap* that we are concerned with is only known to the court as yet; let us avoid the tale becoming public. The Parisians are now too much in the mood for satires for us not to shun giving them, at all costs, fresh subjects for their lively wit. We must repair the mistake ere it attain the dimensions of a scandal, and the man who aids me therein—I give him my word as a gentleman for it—may reckon on my favour and influence. Till to-morrow, gentlemen; but as I am leaving for Fontainebleau in an hour, and it would cause too long a delay to await my return, I will charge . . .

The Prince hesitated a moment.

"I will charge M. le Marquis de Roquelaure, here present, to receive in my name the declaration

I claim, and hope it will be given promptly. Monsieur de Roquelaure," continued the Prince, addressing me more particularly, "have you any objection to offer to the choice I make of you as my plenipotentiary?"

"None, Monseigneur."

"No obstacle in your mind or in your heart," he added, smiling, "that would put you in a false or delicate position towards Mademoiselle de Neuville and prevent your accepting the mandate with which I entrust you?"

"In spite of the passionate admiration I feel for this fair lady," I replied, bowing, "I dare vouch to Your Highness that I will limit myself strictly to the purposes of the high mission of which you judge me worthy."

"Good!" said the Prince, clapping his hand familiarly on my shoulder. "We have seen Roquelaure as soldier, and we will see him as diplomatist. Eh, make no mistake, Marquis, 'tis a noble office, that of mediator."

I was certainly very much honoured by so flattering a proof of trust and esteem; but I must own, between ourselves, that another kind of mission to Mademoiselle de Neuville would have pleased me infinitely better. But I had to accept what came—and I did so with the best grace in the world. And I was not annoyed, in reality, to think that I should be the first to learn the truth of the

history, and found at least some sort of consolation in the satisfaction to my curiosity. Such were the ideas which were flitting in great disorder through my mind when I was recalled to myself by the silvery accents of Bautru's voice, who was speaking to the Prince.

"Monseigneur, will you allow me a simple question?"

"Speak, Monsieur de Bautru. You know you have full liberty of speech here. We are listening."

"I recognise how wise are the measures taken by Your Highness . . . and I am even assured of their good success . . . and yet . . ."

"And yet?" said M. de Condé, with a slight show of surprise.

"And yet," continued Bautru, "provision must be made for any event."

"That is my desire."

"Your Highness has asked the author of the mishap to reveal himself?"

"Of his own motion," said the Prince.

"*De proprio motu*," added the Abbé, who had pretensions to everything, even to learning.

"I suspect neither the honour nor the frankness of my friends," said Bautru.

"Nor do I," said the Prince, meaningly.

"But after all, Monseigneur . . . if no one came forward?"

"We have forgotten nothing," replied the Prince,

coldly, "and the Queen herself had determined beforehand the conduct she would have to adopt in the case you have mentioned. Mademoiselle de Neuville would be banished from the court for ever."

This declaration was followed by a silence of astonishment, only broken after some minutes had elapsed by the unanimous concert of compliments forming an accompaniment to the Prince's withdrawal. His Highness having signed to me to accompany him to his apartments, I took no part in the comments of every kind which were doubtless passed on the threatening severity of Anne of Austria. As for myself, I considered I should interpret it in a sense entirely favourable to Her Majesty. The libels were growing more intolerable in their insolence from day to day, even the crown's august majesty had not been preserved from the splashing of this foul dirt, and it would have been mere blundering to willingly offer a fresh quarry to the malignity of the opposition. So, in spite of my leaning to tolerance in all matters of amours, I could very well understand why the Queen should show rigour, not to make parade of an unnecessary stiffness such as would have been out of season on any other occasion, but under the stress of an unhappy necessity imposed by the political circumstances of the time.

Nothing worthy of remark happened in the re-

mainder of the day. My head was so filled with incoherent ideas and confused fancies that I kept away from the Tuileries, being afraid of meeting some tedious fellow there who would have cudgelled my ears with the thousand silly trifles whereof is composed the insipid chatter of the idle and the indifferent among the Paris folk. I was thinking of Mademoiselle de Neuville, and I was well resolved to think of no one but her. I remembered that incredible fascination she had exercised upon me when I had first seen her among those who frequented the private apartments of the Queen. I also remembered—'twas an unpleasant memory—how throughout a week I had valiantly besieged her beauty, and had won nothing by the attack but the weariness of an unsuccessful assault; or, to cut the explanation short, the disgrace of defeat. Among these various reflections was mingled the very natural regret that I should have been so simple—for I think that is the comely word for it—to believe in those appearances of virtue which, now that I had come to another point of view, seemed to me sad emblems of feminine hypocrisy. Then my fancy took the bit between its teeth, or, if you like it better, mounted on unchecked pinions, and sought with its utmost strength to encroach upon the realm of fact, forestal the revelation that was preparing, and tell the unknown phantom, whose mask was not to fall till the morrow, his name and his crime. Now I thought with de-

testation of this one, now of that one, and I need not say that all these objects of my thoughts seemed to me alike insolent fops whom I would have cuffed with pleasure. That one or other should be beloved by sweet Blanche de Neuville! I considered no crime could be equal to such a crime . . . and I already regarded as a personal foe the man whose confession I was shortly to hear. However, this latter idea dashed cold water on the flames of my mighty anger. I thought of my duty as mediator; of the Prince's injunctions and of the responsibility, in a word, with which I should be invested as the chosen agent of a treaty of peace, and I assured myself that a man of wit could distinguish himself even in a minor post; that a different kind of glory, yet almost equal, awaited the intrepid warrior and the dexterous negotiator, and in a word that he who worthily comports himself as a legate may achieve as much as a battle won. . . .

However, 'twas natural that these good reasons should not prevail against the bad ones I have set forth above, and so I fell back again upon my wild imaginings, and in spite of my resolution to preserve equanimity passed as tedious and troubled a night as could be.

Such was my impatience that I arose at sunrise. I do not remember to have been so early before. All that I could do to make dressing a long affair could not carry the business beyond an hour or

two, so I had to exhaust all the known means of killing time till day begins in Paris, a moment which has a very good title to be accounted a second dawn. For do not the women rise late in the morning, and thus make the shining of their beauty late? And to carry out the comparison to completion, are not the rays of this sun equal to those of the other?

However, I began already to be seriously surprised that no one came. Breakfast time was passed, and, thrown back on my own society exclusively, I did justice to a *bisque aux pigeonneaux* and some *rissoles au sucre*, when I heard a noise of footsteps at some distance in my antechamber. Then a question was answered in a very clear voice :

“ Tell Roquelaure that De Vardes wishes to speak to him.”

I arose, pale and trembling. I would willingly have slit De Vardes' weasand for him. So it was he ! And I had not guessed it ! . . . Poor fellow, he had no suspicion that when I heard his name uttered I ground my teeth and had all the longing in the world to break my glass on his head, and he came up to me in mirthful fashion, with a smile on his lips, and stretched out his arms to me. I own that this manner of entering strongly modified my fierce intentions, and I lacked the steelly quality to give a bad reception to a friend who presented himself with so much candour. So I merely said to him, perchance with a little coldness :

" Ah ! so 'tis you, my dear De Vardes. Have you come . . . about the affair . . . in question ?

" Precisely ! Had you some lurking expectation of my visit ? "

" No, indeed . . . for if I suspected any one . . . "

" It was not I, eh ? "

" I grant you . . . and yet . . . "

" 'Tis an adventure that may happen to the worthiest fellow in the world. Your qualifying clause was quite right. Besides, there are but luck and bad luck in this life, and this affair has gone as if I had directed it. . . . A child, why, 'tis like magic. . . . If you knew ! If I were to tell you by what inconceivable circumstances . . . "

" I have no need to know them, and excuse you from all idle details. The task laid upon me by the Prince is hard enough as it is. . . . "

" Ah . . . yes ! I see. You, too, my poor friend, sighed for her . . . and your aspirations were misplaced. . . . Well, egad, shall I tell you ? You knew not the way to go about it. . . . "

" Possibly," I interrupted, tired of De Vardes' digressions. " Allow me to keep within my official duties. You heard the Prince's will ? "

" I was present when he expressed it in lucid and exact terms. . . . "

" You accept his conditions ? "

" With my eyes shut . . . in the hope that he will not forget his promises. "

"His Royal Highness shall be informed of what you have done, and you will soon hear from him. That is all I have to say to you."

"And in that way you bow me out?"

"What makes you think so?"

"Your solemn tones and air of annoyance. Roquelaure, 'tis an ill thing. You receive me as the Parlement men receive one of the King's edicts. Come now, is it my fault if the adorable fair . . . for if you would only let me tell you . . . just in brief . . ."

"Neither in brief or in full. I repeat that I want to know none of it . . . for I know too much already."

"I am away then," said De Vardes. "I thought I should find someone to speak to here! A friend or at least a man of good sense . . . Not a whit . . . I find an intolerable plenipotentiary, as cold as marble and as stiff as a stake, who looks at me from the top of his discretion, and questions and answers in monosyllables, as if whole phrases were incalculable value. As you please, my trusty one, as you please. Oh, but just one word more. Take good care of my interests; make M. le Prince grasp the fact that Mademoiselle de Neuville and I have scarcely any dowry between us but her beauty on her side and my blade on mine. We look to him to throw a few drops of honey into the cup of Hymen, which is often the more bitter the less there is in it. . . . As for me, I am not lacking in good will, and am inclined to

drink deep draughts from it. Tell him I thank him for the good action he has suggested to me, and that perhaps the matter is more pressing than is supposed—for, if I am not out in my reckoning . . . it is now nearly three months . . .”

“Again!” said I, plainly losing my temper this time, “can you not leave me in peace?”

“Well, the little detail was not superfluous. You want none of it? Well, you shall have no more. Stay, give me your hand while I am still a bachelor. When I am married, perhaps I shall grow intolerable. . . . *Bon soir!*” n

De Vardes withdrew, not without having vexed my ears by a great deal of similar nonsense. When I was alone again I tried to take counsel with myself about the hastiness my manner with him had betrayed, and I feared that he might take advantage of the condition in which he had found me to make me the laughing-stock of the whole court. But though I got my foot on to reasonable ground now and then, it was in vain, for I forthwith started off again towards those romantic visions of my unsuspected love. Only the absolute respect I had always shown for the Prince had kept matters smooth. But for the august name of him whose mandate I had, I should have challenged De Vardes without rhyme or reason, like a fool who knows not what he is doing.

A fever had got from my heart to my brain, and I was under the influence of one of those vague confu-

sions that make the plainest things obscure to our eyes and set everything dancing around us. But in the midst of this gloomy chaos shone a glimmer of good sense, and I told myself in a sort of aside that I must at once get in the saddle and set out for Fontainebleau to give account of the fine results of the undertaking. . . . In the midst of all this, I was told that Navailles was demanding to be introduced into my presence immediately.

"Bring him in," said I, in a tone of annoyance.

Navailles appeared upon the threshold of the door, standing upon tiptoe, with a finger mysteriously laid upon his lips. He seemed to be in terror of being seen, and when I bade him enter without fear, he answered by the one word, intolerably prolonged :

"Hu—sh !"

"Eh! gadswings!" cried I, fixing my eyes upon him with open amazement. "Whence had you, my dear Navailles, this mystical air that I have not seen about you before, and which does not in the least become you?"

"Hush!" repeated Navailles, with the same assiduous precautions. "Are you alone?"

"Assuredly . . . can you not see as much?"

"Sometimes walls have eyes and ceilings ears. . . . Are you quite sure about it?"

"Fear nothing."

"Well, my dear Roquelaure, I have come about the little matter in question."

"What matter?"

"The one you know of."

"Lucifer take you and your mysteries! What do you mean?"

"Zounds! what you have guessed only too well already. But the truth is I am at my wit's end, and the Prince has put me in the most difficult, equivocal position in the world. . . . On the one hand, I would not for all the wealth of India disobey His Highness . . . on the other, while I rightly appraise the rights which Mademoiselle de Neuville has upon a loyal man . . . still, one word is as good as a hundred for it; I am under engagement elsewhere!"

While Navailles was speaking, my imagination had been working like a squirrel that with a vast deal of trouble and motion never gets beyond the same place. I was, as it were, turning round upon myself and stupefying myself with the buzz of the process. I cut him short by saying:

"Navailles, how long have you taken to making up puzzles?"

"How long!" replied he. "Do you not yet understand? Is a man obliged to call things by their names with you and to dot every i?"

"I own that my rather — recalcitrant — intelligence . . ."

"Well, we will have less parade about it," said Navailles, merrily. "I had the happy mischance

of passing a mad night between the same sheets as the Neuville; it seems that a little gentleman of my race is to originate from these frolics; the Prince desires I should marry; I do not care about it. . . . Now that I hope explains the facts as no lawyer from the nearest court would have managed it. Is it clear now? I have come to ask you if you see no way to get me out of it?"

"I see one," I answered with a solemnity that scarcely squared with my usual levity.

"You think I can avoid the marriage?"

"I am sure of it."

"Come, are you a conjuror, a sorcerer, a demon? 'Tis well for you Richelieu is dead, for he would have made bad times for you. For by what charm will you work? What subtle tactics or happily-invented expedient will you employ?"

"That is my business. Allow me to put just one little question to you?"

"Two, if you like."

"You know there are dreams which greatly resemble reality . . .?"

"'Tis possible, but I never gave great heed to it."

"Men often fancy things . . .?"

"Perhaps . . . but what is your drift?"

"This. Come, all dreaming apart, are you quite sure . . .?"

"Of what?"

"That you did . . .?"

"What?"

"Well, you were deeply enamoured of Blanche . . . this famous night you mention . . . these sheets I hear so much about . . . this child that you put to your own score . . . perhaps you imagine it all?"

"Imagined it!"

It was too much for Navailles. He burst into such a roar of laughter to my face that I was left looking very foolish and out of countenance. When he had had enough he pressed my hand and said:

"The poor fellow! I think he is going mad . . . it would be a pity . . . but in spite of it, may I reckon on you?"

"You may, and you will see that I am not so mad as you suppose."

"So much the better," cried he; "so much the better. Besides, I only spoke in jest. But my position is serious; and, between ourselves, you, by keeping your promise, would do me a service the more substantial because—if I must tell you—I am now in pursuit of a tender quarry whom I would force to ask mercy of me at the very foot of the altar . . . you know . . . pretty Suzanne de Neuillan. I have made my declaration, the matter is going forward apace, but the least obstacle that chance or malevolence should introduce beneath the wheel of my chariot might suffice to overthrow all. You will not leave me in the lurch, eh?"

"I will not leave you in the lurch, 'tis agreed."

Navailles went out apparently much reassured, but in reality very anxious by reason of my equivocal manner, which he could not have failed to observe.

Without abandoning myself once more to reflections, which would have cost me much time without clearing up the obscurity, I took my sword and my Spanish gloves, and called Cascarel, who had now for many months replaced Bruscombille in his functions. Nothing was left me to do but hurry to Fontainebleau to render an exact account to the Prince of what had passed. My arrangements were soon made for, body and soul, I was possessed by a kind of fever which remarkably increased the energy and agility of my movements. I went downstairs. My horse was saddled and was pawing the ground with impatience, and I was upon the point of mounting, when . . .

If I gave the whole chapter of accidents that hindered me that fatal day I should never get to the end of it, that is, if I undertook to narrate them one by one, omitting no details. It shall suffice to say that when my left foot was already off the ground and I had the reins in my hand, I saw the Chevalier d'Albret advancing towards me with a smiling face and a triumphant air. No sooner had he set eyes on me than he shouted :

"Eh ! Roquelaure, my best of friends, whither are you going ?"

"To Fontainebleau."

"To the Prince?"

"Certainly."

"Egad, then, I am in the nick of time to stay you from making a grievous blunder. Do you not see that you are forgetting something?"

"What am I forgetting?"

"A word from me for His Highness."

"Chevalier," cried I, shuddering for the third time, "have you something for the Prince's ear?"

"Aye, something—so it please you—of a very interesting sort."

I left my mount and led the Chevalier d'Albret into the vestibule, for his giddy manners and loud voice were little apt to the keeping of a secret of any kind. When we were within I shook him by the arm and said:

"Well, be quick, for you see time presses with me. What is this weighty communication?"

"Oho!" said the Chevalier, who was diverted by my serious mien. "What a gloomy look! What a cloudy and forbidding brow! A man would say some misfortune had just befallen you."

"You are in a different case," I replied with discernible ill humour, "a man would swear you had just discovered the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone."

"Why, if it is not altogether that," said the Chevalier d'Albret, "'tis something akin to it. Zounds! Even yesterday I had not made up my

mind. I was hesitating . . . I was looking back, as it were; I was reflecting on the delicious bonds that unite me to a certain blonde . . . whom you do not know . . . and on the vows I swore but lately to a little brunette who deigns to find me well-looking. How shall I convey it to you? This all checked me. We men take a wide view of life; we have so many amours afoot, so many pretty intrigues to work out. . . . In sober truth, I had my doubts. But the night begets wisdom. I reflected; I found a reason. After all, the chain of wedlock riveted on a man's arm is no heavier than many another chain that we rivet on our hearts. Upon one hand I saw there was freedom and upon the other comfort and wealth . . . 'twas on that side the balance fell. With the Prince's patronage my fortune is made . . . so here we go for marriage. . . . I will wed her."

"You will wed her. Whom will you wed?"

"Mademoiselle de Neuville, egad. . . ."

"Again!"

"Why, it will be the first time . . . at the altar."

"Nay, that is not what I mean."

"Then explain to me . . ."

"'Tis nothing . . . go your way, and leave me . . . I must set off . . . I will see you later, tomorrow . . . as soon as I come back . . . Farewell!"

And I leaped upon my horse. Cascarel did the same, and we left the Chevalier d'Albret in the middle

of my courtyard, as much amazed at my retreat as he had been at his reception, and no doubt convinced, like the others, that I had lost my wits.

I did not know whither I was to ride . . . and yet it is likely I should have taken the straight road to Fontainebleau if I had not been stopped, at two hundred paces from my house, by the pensive gentleman whose sad profile I sketched a little earlier. It was the young Comte d'Olonville, and he prayed me by a gesture of his hand to check my horse's eagerness and listen to him for a moment. I immediately remembered the sentimental name we had given him on his arrival at the court, and forthwith concluded that his first words would change our conjectures to certainty. Nor was I wrong. The Comte d'Olonville was no aspirant, but the fortunate lover of Mademoiselle de Neuville. . . . He was no less conscious of his obligations than his predecessors had been, and was prepared to atone before the altar, by a gift of his whole life, for the misdeed of a moment. . . ."

"Why, nothing could be better, my dear count," I said to him with outward gravity, stifling my desire to laugh as best I could; for it will be owned the matter was verging on the grotesque. "I will go at my best speed to explain your intentions to the Prince and all will be arranged, I hope, to meet your wishes."

D'Olonville left me with sighs upon his lips, and with his eyes raised to heaven. Even M. de Segrain's lovelorn shepherds had not a more pitiable air than

he. As matters stood, the poor fellow seemed to me superlatively laughable, and the result was an impression on which I had every reason to congratulate myself. There was a sudden revulsion within me. The prospect changed entirely, and where just before I had thought that I had great reason to feel sorry for myself, I now perceived all the necessary elements of a sport whereby I might greatly divert myself, if I knew how to put the matter in hand with skill and due restraint. So I turned my horse aside and set him to a walking pace, and then directed my course out into the country, with the purpose of wandering there an hour or two, and I addressed myself in the following sensible terms, which I give as nearly as possible :

“De Vardes must have thought me very stupid. Navailles imagined I was losing my wits. D’Albret will tell everybody that he thought me like a fugitive from a madhouse. . . . Can I find fault with them? No. If out of all this any mischance befalls me, whom am I to blame but myself?”

Having once struck the true line I did not stop. First I admitted that the tragic kind of love makes demands which certain kinds of natures cannot comply with, and that my nature was of this sort; and, secondly, that having allowed myself to feel sentiment just this once and for a little while, I could not have found a worse object for the display. Nevertheless, if I, as the rejected lover, no longer felt the same, I

had the same duties as ambassador and I had to find some means of freeing myself from all these complications in a creditable fashion. Force of circumstances had retarded my journey to Fontainebleau ; I could not go to His Highness with so unseemly a tale unless I could tell him at the same time by what contrivances I proposed to set the matter right. It seemed to me more fitting that I should act as chance directed me and in full liberty, leaving the appraisalment of the means I employed to his sovereign judgment afterwards.

When I had mastered the situation I acted like a general in command, who asks himself whether he will attack the enemy in front, in the rear, or in flank. I had to choose between two courses, either to dance attendance upon the rivals whose claims had been declared to me, and require them to come to an understanding about a precise and loyal sharing of their rights, or seek out this new Helen, cause of so many combats, and remit to her high sense of justice the decision to be made in a matter so embarrassing and bawdy that to set it right, I think, nothing but the wisdom and discretion of Solomon would have sufficed. Perhaps the latter of these two courses was not the more obvious, but it was that to which I suddenly inclined for reasons which I do not think myself obliged to set forth, because they will be divined much more clearly than I could express them.

Before going to see Mademoiselle de Neuville I

changed my travelling garb for an irreproachable court toilette; the privileges of human coquetry never lapse. As for my mental posture, it may easily be guessed—it was the most smiling and tolerant that can be imagined. I had no idea of mounting into the pulpit and threatening my fair penitent with eternal torments, or overwhelming her with the thunder-bolts of excommunication. My plan was far less grim, and in my view, was more likely to succeed. I meant, after convincing Mademoiselle Blanche that all dissimulation would be vain between us, to concert with her the stratagems and shifts that must be employed to get quit of so awkward a complication. I had resolved to set her at her ease by my first words, and to evince for her, at this embarrassing moment, the sympathy and devotion of a friend. Then, beside the duties of this praiseworthy self-sacrifice, I had brought into account, by way of recompense, certain hopes whereof it seemed to me unlikely that she would refuse me the fruition. All trouble deserves its reward, all service its payment, and the currency in which Mademoiselle Blanche seemed to pay her debts was too much to my liking for me to be indifferent as to getting my share of it.

From this statement it will be seen that the change in me was complete, and that my aspirations were no longer such as would prompt laughter at my expense. I brought my actions up to the level of my

plans, and burst upon the piquant maid of honour without preliminary ceremony, as a man thoroughly resolved not to expose his self-respect to a refusal.

At the moment when I arrived Mademoiselle de Neuville was engaged upon a magnificent work of embroidery. A few paces from her, before a window that looked out upon the garden of the Royal Palace, was a well-looking girl, whom it was easy to recognise by her costume for a simple maid, though her elegant figure and intelligent eyes might, perhaps, have betrayed to practised eyes a more noble origin. This observation on my part was the result of a rapid and almost careless glance. All my batteries were concentrated on one point and aimed at one object. Mademoiselle Blanche seemed not in the least surprised at my visit; she begged me to be seated with perfect grace, and asked me in a calm and sweet voice to what happy circumstance she owed a pleasure that I had not, by her account, granted her frequently enough. I replied as gallantly as I could to these advances, and finished by saying that I had matters to communicate to her which concerned the happiness and repose of her whole life.

At that phrase she trembled violently, and the maid herself raised her eyes and I saw how they gleamed. There was a moment of silence, and at length Mademoiselle de Neuville said to me :

“Speak, Monsieur de Roquelaure, I am ready to hear you.”

"We should be alone . . . quite alone," I replied in a low voice.

"I fear no one," replied the maid of honour, without altering her tone; "besides, I have no secrets from La Borde."

This, it appears, was the name of the maid, who did not move, but continued to direct her gaze calmly upon the garden. I avow that the presence of a witness annoyed me rather keenly at first; but, upon reflection, I assured myself that mystery was not absolutely essential for me, but concerned the lady a thousand times more. I had done my duty in asking for a *tête-à-tête*. As I had not obtained it, I was not responsible for what might ensue.

I entered upon the question with frankness. I set forth the Prince's will, and explained the nature of my mission in a few words. I was interrupted by Mademoiselle de Neuville, who said to me in a very well controlled voice:

"Do you think, Monsieur le Marquis, that you will have better success than Queen Anne of Austria, and that I can grant you an explanation which I thought it right to refuse to Her Majesty?"

I carefully weighed my reply, and before uttering it I again indicated, by a gesture of the hand, the inconvenient witness; and I still persisted in veiling quite half of my meaning in her presence. Mademoiselle Neuville replied gently:

"Have I not told you, sir, that I fear nothing?"

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle, but I cannot share your feeling of assurance. What I have yet to tell is of a nature to frighten some ears, and, in truth, I dare not . . ."

"You *may* dare, Monsieur le Marquis; and I beg you to. If need be, I will enjoin it upon you."

"You shall be obeyed," I replied sternly.

For a moment I sought in my mind how to tackle so thorny a subject. I should have been glad if she had helped me; but I understood from her manner that I should have to get all my aid from myself. So I trusted to my inspiration, and principally aimed at handling the matter rapidly.

"Mademoiselle, since I must speak plainly, I shall try to go to the pith of the affair, and yet without offending you, so as to make myself understood. . . . In a word, 'tis no longer a question of giving an explanation but of making a choice . . ."

"A choice! . . . What choice?"

"You . . . do not guess?"

"No; I must admit I do not. You tell me of some plan or other conceived by the Prince. The plan itself is one piece of folly which only my respect for His Highness restrains me from calling by another title. And you, Monsieur de Roquelaure, a gentleman of sense and good feeling, have undertaken to carry out the plan. That is another piece of folly, about which I will not seek to accuse you, for I am certain you yourself will repent of it sooner than you think.

I beg you, let us leave all this to settle itself, and not make a scandal out of what is in reality very simple and natural. Appeal has been made to the imaginary lover who is supposed to have claims upon me. . . . I do not fear that test, Monsieur le Marquis. The lover does not exist; so he will not speak. I defy any man in the world to raise his voice and shame me with a reparation for which I have not asked. Your duty will soon be discharged. Mademoiselle de Neuville asks pity of no one, and her hand is not to be sold . . . nor given. That is the answer you can take from me to him who sent you."

The incredible assurance with which these words were uttered made me for a few moments forget even the strange facts I myself had been witness to, though the evidence of them, for that matter, could hardly be contested. The indiscreet circumference of the form before me spoke a language which is common to all countries, and unless I was to take all that had been said as articles of the faith and believe them blindly, I was forced to raise some doubts and not admit myself absolutely convinced. I could not with any fitness let myself be carried by amazement like a fool, or cajoled like a blind man and shown out like an ass. So I took the great liberty of retorting upon the fine reasons whereof Mademoiselle de Neuville had striven to build a house of cards, and thinking that I had but to blow upon it to overwhelm it, I resolved to pepper my arguments with a few grains of banter and a very moderate pinch of irony.

"Mademoiselle," said I to her, still preserving all the appearances of a profound respect, "if Patru himself had been charged with your defence, he certainly could not have been either cleverer or more dignified. And yet I have to tell you . . . the whole truth. You say the imaginary lover attributed to you will not appear and will not speak. Unhappily for your assertion, Mademoiselle, this same lover has been multiplied by some miracle or other, and might easily be taken for one of those monsters presented to us in the fables with many heads and arms in proportion. For my part, I have already seen four who seemed to have no great inclination towards silence, and these, after speaking in hushed tones to me, might afterwards desire to speak aloud. I ought at least to warn you of this . . . as a friend."

Mademoiselle de Neuville changed colour half a score of times while she listened to me. But she had courage enough to refrain from interrupting me. However, when I had finished my statement of the case, she crossed her hands with an almost tragic air and asked me, in a voice vibrating with outraged dignity, if I had come to arrogate the right to insult her to her face. I made a thousand protestations, and my sincerity lent them some real force. But she interrupted me again, and resumed with impatient eagerness:

"We must bring this to an end, Monsieur le Marquis. What do you mean by these obscure allusions? Is there a conspiracy to ruin me? And

to gain that end have they thought so little of you as to hold you capable of spreading lying rumours and bespattering a defenceless woman with the venom of these infamous slanders? "

This was a direct attack, and it revolted me.

"Oddsbody, Mademoiselle!" cried I, pushed beyond endurance, "if you will allow it, I am neither a coward nor a traitor, nor one that hawks lying rumours. To my great regret I am a most embarrassed man handling an unpromising business. You have complained that my language is obscure; so I will be plain. I have begged you to accord me private speech with you, and you were not willing! . . . Very well, then, call in yet more people, if that would suit your mood, I will raise no opposition. I will even shout what I have to say from the house-tops if you insist on it. To begin . . ."

Mademoiselle de Neuville gave vent to a deep sigh.

"Oh, never fear, I will not be prolix. Here are the facts in half-a-dozen words. A child is about to be born. For the honour of the court, the Queen and the Prince do not desire that it should be a bastard to whom a haphazard name and a forged coat-of-arms would have to be given. Upon your refusal to name your . . . accomplice, His Highness has appealed to that man without knowing who he is, and has given him twenty-four hours in which to declare himself. That was six hours ago, Mademoiselle,

and so lucky is the child in question that four fathers are already disputing the privilege of the parentage. All ~~assert~~ they have equal rights, all declare they can support their assertion by proofs. What wrong have I done in all this? Rather thank me that I did not go to the Prince with the story of this new facetious kind of procession, but came straight to you, like a friend or a brother, to help you to find the way out of the labyrinth into which your imprudence has led you, and aid you in making a choice."

I had let slip this flood of words with the utmost facundity, and only observed the effect I had produced when the last word was uttered. Anne of Austria's maid of honour was as pale as death. Her frame was bowed, her head bent, and her knees had given way under her; she was clutching the back of an ottoman that was near to her with a kind of violence, and she whispered with a stifled voice:

"Who are the men you speak of?"

"Is it needful I should state their names here?"

"I demand it."

"Well, then, De Vardes was the first."

"What a villain!"

"Then came Navailles . . ."

"He too!"

"To those two must be added, as you wish it, the young Chevalier d'Albret and the little Count d'Olonville . . ."

"Enough! Enough!" said Mademoiselle de Neuville, stretching her arm out towards me.

"You wish to hear no more? Nothing could fall out better, for 'tis all I have to tell . . . and now I have but to receive your instructions." •

"Monsieur," answered Mademoiselle de Neuville proudly, "I have nothing to say to a man who has so contemned me as to give belief to hideous jests which could but originate in brains sodden by orgies or minds stricken with madness. One other word. I would have it known that I would rather leave the court than condescend to explanations unworthy of me. If I consented to hear more, I should forfeit my self-respect; and now you have nothing more to do here. Leave the room, sir."

I tried once more to put forward those means of defence which I thought satisfactory.

"I have asked you to leave the room," she repeated coldly.

All the vocabularies in the world could not have altered the meaning of this last order by a jot. She was showing me the door. It was as clear as could be, and 'twould have been in vain to try to deceive myself about it. The last sounds of a futile protest died away upon my lips, for a gesture of hers, instinct with imperious dignity, cut short my utterance, and even rendered me insensible for a few moments to the offence against my pride.

I quitted the Palais-Royal with humiliation on my face and rage in my heart.

What was I to believe? What conclusion could

I draw? Was I the dupe of an impudent piece of acting, or had Mademoiselle de Neuville's four suitors fooled me? In the first case there could be nothing but a war of words, and it was but natural I should let my opponent, being a woman, have the trifling advantage of a seeming victory. But, under the second supposition, that is to say, if my friends had banded together to play a trick on my credulity and send me on a fool's errand, my sword would have to repair so grievous an outrage, and I could not be at peace till a complete and bloody satisfaction had been given.

The disturbance of my mind prevented me from remaining still for a single instant. First I walked around the Dome, then to the Place au Change, and then to the Quai du Louvre. After this I crossed the river once more and sought refuge in my house.

I was giddy, sick and well-nigh beside myself with the shocks I had received, and would gladly have made an end of something or somebody. . . .

Cascarel, as the first person who came in my way, received a good share of the effects of my ill-humour. But he persisted in following me and saying something which I persisted in not hearing.

At last he shouted to me:

"Monsieur le Marquis . . . it is a letter . . . an urgent letter, do you understand?"

I stared at Cascarel, seized the letter roughly, read it, and was amazed. Here are the contents of it:

"The pen shakes as I hold it, Monsieur le Marquis. I know not in what terms to beseech your pardon. I was wrong, I feel it, and I would give the world to have withheld the venomous words that so imprudently escaped me. I pray you, do not make me more bitterly repent a guilty impulse for which spite and wounded pride are more to blame than my heart. Perhaps I ought to think this written prayer sufficient; but I should be calmer if I could hear the assurance of your generous forgetfulness from your own lips. Besides, 'twill be the occasion to prove to me that you not only practise generosity but another quality whereof a gallant gentleman is proud—I mean discretion. You wished to speak to me alone, and I refused. Now it is I who seek the favour of you. I have so many wrongs to repair, so many difficult confessions to make to you! From eleven till midnight the side door of the servants' quarters will be open, and I shall await you.

"BLANCHE DE NEUVILLETTE."

"Shall I go, or shall I not?" I whispered to myself. "The devil take me if I know what I should do!"

But, instead of taking me, as he might have done, the devil thought well to whisper in my ear:

"Go!"

I resumed my meditations.

"Has Monsieur le Marquis any orders to give me?" Cascarel, who had been standing silently at a few paces from me, asked after a few moments.

"I shall go out this evening, and no doubt the night will be far advanced before I return. You will not go to bed till I am back?"

Cascarel inclined his head in token that he understood my drift ; and thereupon I enjoined upon him, by a similar sign, to get out of my sight, which he did without stumbling, like the model valet that he was.

“ Decidedly,” thought I, after I had ten times reread this perfumed letter, whose scent of amber had gradually appeased my anger, “ life is a riddle, man is a weathercock, and woman . . . woman is the devil ! ”

CHAPTER XXV

I keep watch in the street—A mysterious entrance—Anxiety—One hundred and twenty-eight steps—A meeting in the darkness—The compact—Strange revelations—What has become of my love?—I am cured—Praiseworthy project of conversion—A disturbed night—An intended withdrawal—A second meeting—Dawn of day—A nightmare—Coup de théâtre—A fresh surprise—Things bid fair to become tragic—A terrible avowal—A sample of feminine perversity—Whither jealousy may lead—An almost unheard-of revenge upon a rival—Repentance and remorse—For every sin forgiveness—Away to Fontainebleau—Treaty with Mazarin—I win freedom for a Parlement man—Kissing hands—Madame de Landrecies—A conjugal scene—Husband and wife—A walk around a pond—A conclusion worthy of the commencement—Four duels—The pitiable appearance of four discomfited lovers—They are left in doubt—An unforeseen incident—A satisfactory explanation which does not satisfy everybody—At the Queen's table—Jean Puget de La Serre—The Count de Lude's bon mot.

THE night seemed to me very long in coming, but it came, and I set forth two hours too soon, as almost always happens when a man's interest is so keenly engaged. The door that Mademoiselle de Neuville had named was one in the back part of the servants' quarters, in the west part of the palace. It was the way of admission for certain mysterious meetings and for unceremonious entrance to the private apartments.

I think I was as sombre as the shadows around me, and as silent as the tomb while I alternately walked with impatient steps, or stood as motionless as the god Terminus; I was like an outlying sentinel who, intrusted with a perilous post, is determined to defend it with his life. I looked with mistrust at the idlers who sauntered too close to me, and shrugged my shoulders by way of defiance of the slow movement of cynic Time as I heard the chimes of the clocks near by, and all this while I kept an eager eye upon the porch, longing to rush to it with all the vehemence that belongs to a pair of legs long condemned to a tedious inactivity.

At last the time named came, and at the hour, exactly to the minute, I heard the feeble wooden rampart, which had parted me from the goal I had sought with so much perseverance, describe a half-circle with a creaking noise; it thus allowed the passage of a dim light from a lamp suspended, I suppose, in the storey above. Certainly not a second elapsed between my perceiving the signal and standing on the longed-for threshold. One leap brought me thither. I opened my mouth to speak, but silence was imposed on me; and then when I wanted to see who was leading me in, the lamp was extinguished.

Was I in the power of some hideous witch who was preparing to carry me off for unholy revels mounted on the indispensable broomstick, or on the skinny wings of a bat proportioned to my size? Was

this rendezvous a plot or a trap? Were they seeking to cover me with ridicule after overwhelming me with shame?

To all these questions I inwardly replied by the highly reasonable word,

“Wait.”

It was a sound resolve, and my patience was in fact submitted to a severe test. The invisible person whose guidance I followed maintained a strict incognito, so, as I had nothing better to do, for conversation had been forbidden me, I amused myself by counting the steps of the interminable ladder that I was being made to climb under the guise of stairs. I arrived, not without some loss of breath, at a total of one hundred and twenty-eight steps. Evidently we were in the top storey.

At this point the mysterious hand released me, and I understood that my entrance into the sanctuary of the strange goddess was an accomplished fact. The distant rustling of a silk gown showed me in which direction I should turn my steps, for it must not be forgotten that I was still surrounded by the blackest obscurity, and had I not been sure that I had read Mademoiselle de Neuville's letter with my own eyes, I might seriously have feared that I was in company of some fading coquette, hostile to light, or of some old miser with a madness for excessive thrift in candles.

Thus were my thoughts wandering over the plains

of the unknown, when a sweet voice, issuing from the darkness like the warbling of birds from a thicket, carried away some of my doubts and persuaded me that the trap into which I was about to walk—if it were one—would not be lacking in charms and pleasures. The voice was full of the quivering passions of youth, and scattered the impressions that had naturally arisen from so many badly auguring precautions. Under the influence of that magic resonance the dark veils that draped the walls became enamelled with fair stars, the night seemed to me less thick, my slackened heart-strings awakened pleasurable, and I seemed to see before me the woman whom I sought, smiling and majestic, in all the glowing brilliancy of her beauty.

I rushed forward . . . a tender arm was outstretched and stopped me; then, finding that delicate fingers were pressed on mine, I let myself be guided to a sofa that afforded just room for two.

“Let us be seated,” said the same voice, which was now graver and more steady. “Let us be seated, Monsieur de Roquelaure, and converse.”

I obeyed . . . and as she was long in beginning to talk, I took the liberty of saying :

“Do you not think it is very dark here? And do you not agree that a ray of light . . . ?”

“What do you ask? Is it so great a joy for a man to see a woman blush?”

“Pardon me,” cried I; “pardon me. . . . Let us say no more about it.”

I had made a bad beginning of it, and thought I should show myself wiser if I saved the resources of my wisdom for my replies. There was nothing for it but that Mademoiselle de Neuville should speak, and at last she did so after much hesitation.

"Monsieur le Marquis, I did not treat you well?"

"Indeed. . . ."

"Do not overwhelm me. . . . I was unjust, I see it, I feel it."

"The more unjust," replied I, letting a shadow of reproach manifest itself in my tones, "because I was employed upon an embassy of peace. Do you know that between two powers, after such a violation of the law of nations, there would have been an immediate challenge and declaration of war?"

"Must it be the same with us?" asked my companion softly, and I thought she drew nearer to me.

"Can you think so?"

At the same time I took Mademoiselle de Neuville's hand, and she allowed me the privilege. There was a moment of silence, and then I cried while I ardently pressed the hand:

"I will ask but one thing as earnest of the reconciliation."

"What is it?"

"The truth."

"I will tell it," she replied gently, "under three conditions."

"I accept them in advance."

"First, you will hear me without interrupting."

"I am pledged to it."

"Then that you will exactly fulfil the commission I shall give you."

"If it be not too much opposed to that the Prince has laid upon me."

"And last, swear on your honour that you will leave this place ere day."

"I swear it."

And hereupon the confessions began.

Never, never, I say, even when at Lectoure I had taken Father des Martelles' place, had such a diversion been offered to my ears. Mademoiselle de Neuville's voice was charged with emotion as she told me, in veiled phrases, the strangest things imaginable. Had the two heathen courtesans, Aspasia and Lais, been brought to life again in Christian times and confessed their sins to some father of the ancient church, they certainly could not have told more. At first I was amazed at her frankness, then I began to fear it might be but cynicism, and for a moment I shuddered at the idea that it might be madness. . . . For why should she dwell at such unsparing length on such a doubtful subject? I was not the Inquisition, and she must know well that even when I demanded the truth from her I did not intend to use violence or torture to drag it from her word by word and detail by detail.

"How treacherous are appearances!" I thought. "During the day she seemed to me so majestic, dignified, and chaste. True, 'tis now night-time."

A bath of icy water could not have more completely frozen me than this rash, scarce credible declaration which I had to hear from beginning to end, a punishment whereof the grievousness will be understood when it is remembered that the words issued from the mouth of a woman whom I had been strongly inclined to love in a serious fashion. No one will deny that it was an unlucky stroke for me, and that I could not have dropped into a more unhappy business. Imagine yourself sincerely enamoured! Think seriously of your love. Try, for the sake of the fair who has touched your heart, to repeat the sighs of Céladon of the Astræa or the wild affection of Roland! Swim, like Leander to his Hero, across a stormy sea under a lowering sky—and that is what awaits you on landing.

I was as easily chilled as heated, and I interrupted my penitent, who seemed to find too much pleasure in the enumeration of her sins, to ask her coldly what she sought of me.

"I am going to tell you," she said in a tone that she seemed to model upon mine, for it suddenly became grave and sad. "The hour of repentance comes sooner or later. It has come for me."

I could not refrain from inwardly remarking that it was time.

She resumed, after a pause that lasted for a minute or two:

"It is my firm intention to enter a convent. Be so good as to tell the Prince of this. I think this

resolve will content both him and Her Majesty, who yesterday invited me to this course. I want you to come to-morrow night accompanied by the Lady Superior and the Almoner of the Ursuline Convent, that they may receive me in that refuge, where I hope to find the peace of heart and conscience that I need so much. But remember this: before the waiting-women, for I shall not then be alone, I shall pretend to be ignorant of the motive of your action, and shall even offer an eager resistance to the execution of your mandate. Do not be surprised at my resistance, which will only be a show, and merely say plainly, so that all may hear, that you are acting in the Queen's name. Thereupon I shall obey, but with a vigorous protest, and thanks to this pretence resolutely maintained, I shall sow certain seeds of doubt in the minds of those around me, and shall pass in the eyes of some for the victim of a terrible mistake. Once I am beyond the world, I shall no longer be swayed by such foibles, Monsieur le Marquis, and shall devote all my thoughts to my salvation. . . . Do you approve of this plan, and will you aid me to put it in practice ? ”

“ All shall be done,” I replied, “ as you have ordered it.”

A certain indescribable embarrassment repelled us the one from the other ; we were eager to be apart from each other, for the echo of the words that had just fallen on our ears was still alive in the air, and it

seemed as if we were ashamed and regretful, she at having uttered them and I at having heard them.

I withdrew, she guided me, and we exchanged no further word. Her hand, which I touched without intending to do so, was hot and trembling, as if in the height of a fever. I also thought she was desirous to speak, but the sound of her voice died on her lips. Was it of use to prolong this punishment of both by seeking further explanations? I judged that such a course would be useless, and only thought of getting away. I crossed the threshold of her apartment, and observed that she forgot to shut the door behind me. Breathing hard, and scarce able to control the movement of her respiration, which I could plainly hear, she violently closed the doors of her bedchamber, and I understood, though I saw nothing, that she had thrown herself fully dressed upon her bed.

I had to get down the stairs feeling my way, for the light on the staircase had been put out, and in spite of myself I made the observation that the man or woman who had led me in took mighty little care of my safety, for what I risked in this dark descent was nothing less than breaking my neck. However, I got to the end of it, to my credit, and jumped triumphantly down the last step, assuring myself that the Prince had charged me with a commission which was not worth the undertaking, and that there are certain bottles of ink into which a man should never shove his finger. At the same

time I was moving forward at haphazard, bumping against the walls now and then, and performing all the zigzags of blindman's-buff without much noting what I was doing. After I had advanced, retreated, and turned about for some time I perceived that the street-door was firmly closed, and that I was shut in like a field-mouse entrapped. . . . I spent quite half an hour in searching in all directions for the glimmer of a night-light or lamp . . . then I consumed half an hour more in thinking what course to adopt. Evidently the person who had guided me when I came in had fallen asleep, and as I knew not where this person lay, and would not for the world have been the occasion of a scandal, I kept quiet till I hit upon a notion that I thought reasonable. This idea required no great effort of the imagination. I simply resolved to reascend the hundred and twenty-eight steps and ask Mademoiselle de Neuville how I was to extricate myself. She alone could tell me this.

So I went up again.

Fortunately her door was still open. I glided softly in between the folding-doors without moving them, and consequently I made no noise. Day was already breaking and whitening the roofs of the houses. A tremulous light had filtered into the room and allowed me, though with some trouble, to distinguish objects. This unexpected aid helped my steps, and I walked towards the bed and stopped

on the threshold of the alcove, fearing to terrify the wearied fair by my return.

The heaviness that had oppressed her before, as I had noted by unequivocal signs, still held sway over her, her breathing was uneven, heavy sighs and sometimes plaintive moans were the symptoms of her strange repose.

She was lying upon the bed, with her arms stretched out, and her hair, loose in ringlets, falling around her.

Just as I stretched forth my arm to awaken her some strange words escaped her lips. I listened; but no connected sense related the words to each other. It was one of those confused hallucinations that are engendered by bad dreams, and are accompanied by horrible torments.

But I distinguished this exclamation, uttered more clearly than the rest :

“She is ruined . . . and I am avenged.”

I approached, drew the curtains apart, and turned pale with horror . . .

It was not Mademoiselle de Neuville!!

I was overcome. The face was not unknown to me, but it would have been impossible to me to attach a name to it. I could remember it, but the recollection was so vague that I tried in vain to give it substance; the reality kept slipping from me.

“Zounds!” thought I, when I felt my efforts exhausted, “I am a very simple fellow to go all this

distance out of my way in seeking when the high-road is open before me. I must wait for the damsel herself to tell me who she is."

I took her arm gently, very gently. I raised it, and gradually increased the force with which I pressed it. At last I lifted her to a sitting posture. Then she opened her eyes, and uttered a loud cry.

"Be quiet," said I to her, "and do not summon witnesses to an interview at which we must be alone . . . quite alone, do you hear?"

"You are a traitor," she replied, drawing herself up forcibly and casting a glance of hatred upon me. "You swore you would leave before day."

"Whether I am a traitor or no, it seems to me that you are a criminal. What do you think about it?"

I uttered the question with a threatening voice, and the wretched woman fixed a haggard gaze upon me and murmured, bowing her head in humiliation:

"I have just awakened from a dream, Monsieur le Marquis, in which I heard the same threat, the same words, and the same voice!"

"So it was your conscience that was speaking. Well, imagine that I am your conscience and answer me. What do your change of name, and the forged letter, and the pretended meeting mean?"

"I will not tell you."

"You will either tell me or I shall deliver you to the *lieutenant-criminel*! A shameless courtesan

has no more the right to take a decent woman's name than a cowardly forger to disguise himself in that of a man of honour. Your skein, my fair friend seems very tangled. Either I or justice must interfere. Reflect . . . and make your choice."

"You would denounce me?"

"Like the vile creature you are! . . . And, though the royal blood flowed in your veins, I should be none the less inexorable, do you understand?"

"So you did not recognise me? I am La Borde, one of Mademoiselle de Neuville's women, and you spoke to her in my presence yesterday."

Then recollections crowded upon me, and I hurriedly resumed:

"Yes, yes, now I remember. . . . Wretch, and 'tis thus you recompense the noble trust she reposes in you?"

"Her trust? Ah, Monsieur le Marquis, never praise that woman before me, for I hate her . . . she is the cause of my soul's ruin . . . and six months ago I meant to kill her."

I released La Borde's arm and recoiled from her in horror.

"You shudder," said she. "The thought of murder frightened me too. Just now you uttered the word cowardice . . . I was a coward . . . an arrant coward, I who speak to you . . . and as I had not the needful courage to shed my enemy's blood, I formed a fearful, an infernal, scheme in my mind to

dishonour her. . . . The scheme was on the point of succeeding, and but for you would have been accomplished. But for you—and I curse and bless you in one breath; for in foiling me of my vengeance, you are perhaps saving me from eternal remorse. Blanche de Neuville, without knowing it, was to pay me for all I have suffered through her. By the same stroke I meant to make her lose the Queen's favour, the world's esteem . . . and even her husband's love. . . .”

“She is married! She! Blanche de Neuville? But to whom?”

“To a man whom I might once have claimed. Two years ago we were at La Rochelle, and my father, whom I have lost since then, had settled the conditions of the marriage, which fulfilled all my girlish dreams. My father was rich . . . very rich, Monsieur le Marquis, and perhaps this man only sought my hand to become master of this great wealth . . . perhaps I accuse him wrongfully . . . I do not know . . . but it is certain that I conceived a violent passion for him, while his liking for me, no doubt, was of the trifling kind that subsides as swiftly as it arises . . . so one day he saw Blanche de Neuville and he transferred to her, the woman who was said to be so lovely and whom I did not know, the homage of which he considered me no longer worthy.

“At that time my father died, and I discovered

that I was finally abandoned. He was repulsed by Blanche's family, so he had recourse to an elopement . . . the pair fled away together . . . then I was seized by a wild desire to behold the woman to whom I owed all my misery and humiliation . . . I was free . . . I came to Paris under an assumed name, and there I soon found that they had been secretly married. Nothing could repair the harm done, but fury does not calculate. I was miserable, and I swore to repay insult for insult, wound for wound, not to him, for I still love him, but to her, upon whom all my hatred fell. So I resolved to follow her footsteps as if I had been her evil genius. . . . But for that, I had to be alone with her, and how could I manage it, if *he* was always there to defend her? Only one means occurred to me, I must separate them. . . . The devil gave me the inspiration I sought. . . . From La Rochelle, where he resided as I had done, M. de Landrecies had maintained an active correspondence with the Duc de Beaufort; that correspondence had been entrusted to my father's hands, and at his death had passed into mine . . . I sent it straight to Mazarin, and M. de Landrecies . . ."

"Was sent to the Bastille, where he remains!"

"From that day my real revenge began, for on that very day, under my assumed name of La Borde, I was received as waiting-woman by Anne of Austria's maid of honour. She was too lovely . . . I felt that

my hatred was to the death . . . it was despair, fury, delirium . . . that woman crushed me with her gentle and calm dignity. . . . I knew that he would love her passionately, and then I thought of striking a fatal blow to both—a blow to reach her haughty forehead, and his heart. The kinder she was to me, the more I hated her; the more she told me of her happiness, the more I sought to compass her ruin! From that moment I made every effort to overturn the idol to which he bowed. . . . I wanted to make his heroine of goodness and virtue into a foul strumpet, and shrank from nothing to accomplish my dreadful plan. Then came a long succession of hateful and terrible struggles . . . repugnance, disgust, remorse; I beat all these down, that in her name I might play the lowest and vilest part there is. Sometimes I was seized by horror at my life, my crime, and myself! But I thought that all the mud which covered me would sooner or later fall on her, and that thought kept me in the infamous path to which I had committed my steps. And yet I must confess, Monsieur le Marquis, that at the moment when I was about to reap the fruit of my efforts, I trembled . . . my shame appeared to me in its dread nudity, and when I sought rest just now, hoping to forget what I had done, a fearful dream oppressed me throughout my slumber . . . and when your fingers clasped my wrist like a bracelet of ice, I thought an iron chain had been riveted there for ever. Who knows? Perhaps God Himself sent you to check me at the very gates

of hell. . . . Well, I thank you for having come ; you have saved me from damnation ! ”

A man must have compassion upon madness, and certainly this strange girl was beside herself. If she had, in truth, been prompted to crime by the excess of a passion spurned, was I called upon to show myself more severe than that old King of Spain who, when he had to judge a courtesan accused of her lover's assassination, said she had too much love to have her reason ?

La Borde, whom I shall continue to call by that name, since I had as yet no cognisance of her true one, fell into such a state of exhaustion after these scarce credible revelations that I even felt anxiety for her life. She was pale and cold ; but gradually recovered strength, though only as a result of fever. I understood from a few phrases which she managed to stammer out that she asked pardon of God, prompt succour of death, and secrecy of me. I took no heed to answer, for she would not have understood me, and now I inwardly pledged myself to handle the matter in such wise as that the fewest persons possible should be affected and as many as possible disentangled. The affair had, in fact, become very difficult to deal with. The most important point, it will be agreed, was to divert the storm which was about to break upon Mademoiselle de Neuville, and dominated by this thought, I contrived to escape unperceived, and started for Fontainebleau with a loose rein.

During all this while, De Vardes, Navailles,

D'Albret, and D'Olonville, who had nothing for it but patience, were stoically awaiting the result of my skilful negotiations. . . . They were far from suspecting the difficulties of every kind which had beset me in my character of legate ; not one of them suspected the upshot, and 'tis true that on this point I was but little further advanced than they.

The court arrived at Fontainebleau at the same time as I, and this greatly helped towards the conclusion of this singular affair. I told the Prince no more than was absolutely necessary, and he was delighted to learn that Mademoiselle de Neuville was fully and honourably exonerated. Anne of Austria shared his satisfaction, and seemed disposed to congratulate her maid of honour forthwith. But I was desirous that nothing should be spoiled by haste, so I begged Her Majesty to let me follow my devices, telling her I had surprised Mademoiselle de Neuville's secret by means that I could not safely disclose, and that upon certain conditions I undertook to settle the matter on the following day.

These conditions had to be arranged between Cardinal Mazarin and me, and no obstacles were raised by His Eminence ; on the contrary, he showed himself generous and merciful in spite of his just grounds of complaint against the man concerned.

I carried away an order for the enlargement of M. de Landrecies, whom I myself went to seek at

the Bastille, and I had not experienced great difficulty in obtaining it.

Two days afterwards, at midday, when the presentations were proceeding, the entire court was assembled in Francis I.'s gallery, and I noted with pleasure that none of the Queen's maids of honour were absent. Mademoiselle de Neuville, who had arrived on the previous day, was paler and less animated than usual. Her servant La Borde was no longer to be seen. As for the suitors, it would have been strange if they had not been at their posts. Not one of them was missing.

The ceremony occupied the time which etiquette prescribed, and the assembly was upon the point of breaking up when, upon a scarce perceptible sign that Anne of Austria made to me, I disengaged myself from the group in which I had been standing on the tiptoe of expectation, and approached Mademoiselle de Neuville with a solemn gait. I shall never, as long as my life lasts, forget the glance she then directed upon me. Perhaps she thought to stop me; but I had no reason to be fearful, and however fierce the fire poured into me from those dark eyes, I had sometimes endured the shock of a ruder artillery. So I put a good face upon it, and quietly offered her my hand.

"How, Monsieur le Marquis," she murmured, "after what passed between us, do you presume . . . ?"

"'Tis the inevitable consequence . . ."

“What do you mean?”

“I mean . . . that all the wrongs committed by the Marquis de Roquelaure against Mademoiselle de Neuville will be pardoned him . . . by Madame de Landrecies.”

“Oh, Monsieur, how did you learn it?” said the unhappy girl, turning pale. “But, for pity’s sake, keep silence! That name must not be mentioned in this palace.”

“Why should I not mention the name,” I replied, in a low voice, “since he who bears it is here?”

The Queen had silently given an order while these last words were being uttered, the door of the gallery had been opened, and Monsieur de Landrecies had appeared, introduced by one of the gentlemen-in-waiting to Her Majesty.

The young Count’s first impulse was to thank Anne of Austria, and he was about to kneel at her feet, but she, always gracious and kind-hearted, took him by the hand, pushed him gently towards his wife, and said :

“Duty after happiness, Monsieur de Landrecies. First embrace your wife ; you shall thank us afterwards.”

The scene was short, and the close of it was happily hurried over. Had it been otherwise, explanations could not have been avoided which, it will be owned, a husband would have thought very obscure. M. de Landrecies no doubt supposed that

his wife had appealed to me to procure his liberty, and that my influence with the Cardinal had brought about all these fine results. He was in a good position for making conjectures. The puzzle was incomprehensible and inexplicable only to Mademoiselle de Neuville, I mean Madame de Landrecies, and for the suitors who, after being decoyed with so fine a hope, saw the quarry hopelessly lost to them.

A conference between the wedded pair, the Prince, the Queen, and me was necessary. Anne of Austria signed to us to follow her into an adjoining apartment. Mazarin soon joined us. Then matters seemed somewhat simplified for the Queen and M. de Landrecies. The former simply believed that Mademoiselle de Neuville, after avowing the marriage, had charged me to plead for the hapless prisoner. The latter, on his side, thought his wife had managed the whole affair; and as the secrecy about their union was not a matter of weight to him personally, he thought, with an appearance of reason, that the motives for mystery which had formerly existed had now entirely disappeared. No doubt he reserved the right to interrogate her upon the matter when first they should be closeted together; but I dealt with this difficulty by preventing him from seeing her alone before I did. In fact, I managed the matter so well that M. de Landrecies and the Cardinal were engaged in animated talk as soon as the Queen left the room, surrounded by her guards, on the way to her apartments.

While M. de Landrecies did all he could to exculpate himself in the eyes of Mazarin, I, with a good show of discreetness, carried his wife off to the embrasure of the furthest window. There, without plainly telling her the whole truth, I made her understand it by veiled phrases. This so affected her emotions that she came near to swooning.

"Pray collect yourself," I said to her, forcing myself to give an example of self-composure. "They are looking at us, and the explanation I have given to you—which I will complete some day—must go no further than ourselves."

"La Borde!" murmured Madame de Landrecies. "A woman I thought so devoted to me! But what words could describe such a crime?"

"The name of it is obvious enough," I replied to her; "it was calumny acted out."

"Another day, and I should have been lost . . . lost beyond recall; and you saved me, Monsieur de Roquelaure."

"Now you are thanking me. What did I tell you you would do?"

With these words I extended my hand to her, and a soft pressure from her pretty fingers recompensed me liberally for all my trouble. As M. de Landrecies left the room, taking his wife with him, the Prince said to me in a low tone:

"I am glad, my dear Roquelaure, that the matter went thus. It is not so painful for you."

I bowed respectfully by way of answer, and contented myself with reflecting,

"How much talent is here uselessly employed! How much policy and diplomacy are wasted!"

An hour later I was wandering in sentimental fashion upon the border of the carp pond, a place which at that moment happened to be deserted, and I saw De Vardes coming towards me. There was a high colour in his face, and his hat was on one side.

"Roquelaure," said he to me, "you have deceived me. Have you any excuse to offer?"

"None."

"Your hour?"

"Midday . . . to-morrow . . . at the Rond-Point des Cerfs."

"Good."

He left me, and I began to pace the walk once more. Of a sudden I found Navailles before me.

"Roquelaure, you have betrayed me. Have you any good reason to give me?"

"Not the least."

"Your hour?"

"Midday . . . to-morrow . . . at the Rond-Point des Cerfs."

"I shall be there."

The remembrance of Blanche and her image returned to my mind, and in my thoughts I persisted in calling her Blanche de Neuville. Not

that I actually grudged M. de Landrecies his success, but I still preferred the name which had, as it were, made sparks of love dance out of my heart, and which still set me dreaming tenderly. . . . At this point the Chevalier d'Albret came upon me.

"Roquelaure, you have fooled me. Have you anything to say to justify yourself?"

"Nothing at all."

"Your hour?"

My answer was invariable, and the Comte d'Olonville, whom I met a few minutes later in the Chevreuil gallery completed the list of the opponents I had to fight on the following day.

The night being past and the day come, I put certain urgent affairs in order, and after passing a delightful morning in the company of Monsieur and Madame de Landrecies, for I now enjoyed the like friendship from them both, I repaired to the ground in cheerful trim.

I arrived first, Navailles came second, and all went well till then. But when the others appeared in turn, accompanied by their seconds, such astonishment prevailed as I will not attempt to depict.

"God's virtue!" cried D'Albret. "Are we here for a tourney? What have we come to do?"

"To fight with me, my friends."

"All of us?" they asked.

"All . . . and, so please you, for the same reason."

"Oh, allow me," said De Vardes; "my position, gentlemen, is very different from yours. It is quite likely you aspired to Mademoiselle de Neuville. But ask Roquelaure if you wish to know how I stand in the matter. He will tell you . . ."

"I have quite as good a story at your service," interrupted Navailles, in a tone of derision, which of itself would have sufficed to bring about a quarrel, "and since you have chosen Roquelaure for arbiter, I also refer you to him."

"One moment," resumed De Vardes, interposing. "If anyone has serious pretensions to the lady in question, I have reason to believe it is none of you. . . . For that matter, there is Roquelaure, and he can declare . . ."

"The truth," cried young D'Olonville, wildly. "So I appeal to him about it, and I asseverate beforehand, gentlemen, that my rights are evident, as clear as day, and that this blade shall maintain them."

"Come, Roquelaure, your answer, your answer!"

My only response was to draw my sword, stick the blade a little way into the earth and bend it, and then I gazed around me for the best stretch of turf. However, as they pressed me to speak, I contented myself with saying quietly:

"Gentlemen, there is a mistake. The favours of which you boast are so many dreams, fancies, and impostures, in which you, nevertheless, believe with

the best faith imaginable, and it would be very difficult for me to wrest your errors from your minds. I prefer to let a little blood for you if I can. All you have to do is to see whether you like to take your turns in playing the little game with me, or leave chance to decide which of you is to draw in the name of all. Make up your minds and resolve. I shall await your will."

"The deuce!" said the Chevalier d'Albret, "'tis mighty awkward, for before getting to work, I own I should be well enough pleased to get a little light upon this mystery. Plainly, there's something in the wind. If we kill Roquelaure, gentlemen, we shall know nothing about it."

"True," added De Vardes, "and for my part I should be pleased to know what is going forward. Come, Roquelaure, do you remember what I confided to you the other day?"

"Perfectly. But 'twas naught. You never touched Mademoiselle de Neuville's—I should say Madame de Landrecies'—little finger."

De Vardes grew very pale.

"And I?" said Navailles, stroking his moustache.

"Neither did you."

"But I?" cried the Chevalier d'Albret, greatly interested.

"No more than the others."

"As a matter of course," said the Comte d'Olonville, coming forward, "because the happy

possessor of those charms for which you are wrangling is . . . myself."

"Alas! my dear Count, you no more than the others . . . Forgive me, 'tis a little mortification that I am powerless to spare you."

Instead of being simplified, the affair was thus growing both more obscure and more acute. I thought my gentlemen, agog about this fresh point, were going to give their wrath a new direction, which would at least have obtained for me a few moments of quiet and repose. De Vardes looked askance upon the Chevalier d'Albret, young D'Olonville did the same by De Vardes, and Navailles seemed to be meditating some outburst or other. But I was determined to play my part to the end, so I told them to make their arrangements and leave me idle no longer, and, their names having been shaken in a handkerchief, M. d'Albret's came forth the first. He was an excellent swordsman, and I betook myself seriously to my defence.

But scarcely had we crossed blades a minute or two when we saw Cascarel rushing towards us with all his might, shouting as loud as his breath would allow.

"Monsieur le Marquis, one moment, I pray you. Here is a letter that they call most important and very urgent."

"You rascal, do you not see that I am engaged?"

"Read it, Roquelaure, read it," said the Chevalier

d'Albret. "We are not lunatics, and there is nothing to prevent us beginning a second time."

I took the letter from Cascarel's hand, and recognised the writing I had seen upon my famous note of assignation.

"Gentlemen," said I to my four swains, "here is a scrap which will, perhaps, put a vastly different complexion upon matters."

And I began to read. La Borde—for it was she—gave me intelligence that she was entering a religious order that same day, and that, after making full and entire confession of her sins to the priest, she did not wish a virtuous woman to suffer the fresh wrong which my silence would certainly occasion. So she released me from all promises of silence I might have entered into with her . . . the poor girl did not repent by halves . . . and she gave me authority to tell the whole truth. She did even more; she signed her real name, while begging me to remain the sole depositary of this part of her secret. I could not master my emotion when I found that she belonged to the family of V——, one of the most wealthy and respected in La Rochelle.

I put the letter in my pocket, and asked the Chevalier d'Albret if he was for continuing. . . .

"But," said I, addressing the others all together, "make your earnest orisons that I do not fall; for the answer of the riddle is on the tip of my tongue, and now I am free to tell it. So handle me carefully."

"Let us put up our swords," said the Chevalier, "for I am as inquisitive as three women rolled into one, and I think, my friends, you are no less curious than I. Shall we take a turn in the forest with Roquelaure?"

"If he agrees," stammered the Comte d'Olonville, who was likewise burning to hear what I had to say.

"Come, then," said I, showing them the example.

"We are threatened with some fine intelligence," said De Vardes. "Oh, if poor De Landrecies could only hear us!"

"That would be a very good thing," I retorted with a serious voice.

"Indeed! And if his wife were there?"

"If she were here, my good friends, and heard what I have to tell you she would enjoy your confusion, laugh at your amazement, and there is not one of you, I warrant you, would dare raise his eyes to look at her without reddening as he did it."

This daring address was received with murmurs of incredulity, but it was a harmless volley which gave me very little anxiety . . . for I was soon to have my revenge.

We spent a full hour in the forest, talking in whispers . . .

When we again approached the walls of the château there was a remarkable change in the expression of our faces. For my part, I was much more mirthful than when I set out, seeing that I had an enormous

weight lifted from my heart. The last danger that had threatened sweet Blanche had now disappeared.

As for our four seducers, their faces were much longer. From the mistress to the servant was a long step . . . and each as he took it could not quite suppress a grimace of disgust.

The explanation had chiefly profited M. de Landrecies. Everyone revered his wife, and nobody laughed at him.

That night, at the Queen's reception, the bride and bridegroom became the object of everybody's attentiveness, and the Queen showed herself especially gracious to them. She was endowed with that intelligence which is rarely at fault about the real promptings of the heart, and she had understood that if any cloud still remained to darken the reputation of the luckless fair, the royal ægis ought now to protect her against malevolent construction and impertinent smiles. For the rest it was a very dull evening, and I should truly have regretted the use I was making of it had it not been for the Comte de Lude, with whom I had been acquainted a few days, who gave a sparkle to the conversation by his keen and witty rejoinders. Among other things he had a very droll saying for Jean Puget de La Serre, who sometimes came to court under the patronage of the Chancellor; his patron had at one time granted him the appointment of historian to the Queen. This poor M. de La Serre, after wearying Lorraine and

Flanders with his rhapsodies, had resolved to return to Paris, where he was able to live very well by reason of the liberality of certain great personages, and I remember that he used to entertain some influential members of the French Academy. Nevertheless, he would not have crossed the threshold of the court antechambers if the Queen had not expressed a desire to see the absurd poet, who, thinking to display a most refined gallantry, had written beneath one of her portraits, *Douze Annes en une Anne*. For that matter, a sillier and more conceited author has never been seen.

A slight repast had been served, and our rhymester, the while he stuffed himself with cakes and dainty jam tartlets, was boasting that he produced the finest poems of any man in France, and knew how to give them the happiest names. As for the ease with which he wrote, 'twas an endless subject with him, and he declared that he had never been at a loss on any occasion in his life. Whether it were a baptism, a coronation, or a marriage, his muse struck the right key forthwith, and often furnished him with as many as five hundred verses in an hour.

"Wondrous!" cried the Queen, who was diverted by this farcical bragging. "And I would wager, Monsieur de La Serre, that you do not even read them through a second time?"

"'Tis true, Ma'am; for I hold that corrections may sometimes do much harm, but never do good."

“Five hundred verses in an hour,” murmured the Prince; “it will end by killing you, Monseur de La Serre, and were it not that France would be the loser if you rested from your labours, I should imitate the late Cardinal Richelieu, who granted you two thousand crowns pension to work, and should offer you twice as much to write no more.”

“Monseigneur ! ”

“No, no . . . I mean it seriously . . . the health of such a man as you is precious, very precious, sir ! ”

“Monseigneur,” repeated La Serre, bowing with proud humility, “you are in truth too good . . . my verses cost me so little . . .”

“They cost you what they are worth,” said a new speaker in a polite and suave voice.

La Serre turned in the direction whence the reply had come, and perceived the Comte de Lude at a little distance from him ; the Count's attitude was so unassuming, his countenance so agreeable, and his self-possession so perfect, that it would have been in the worst taste to show anger, and it seemed better not to understand. That was the resolve that Puget de La Serre took, and therein at least he displayed some ability.

CHAPTER XXVI

At Fontainebleau—Gallantry of the Prince—A new sport established—Whereby it may be seen that women are as inquisitive as they are impatient—A voyage of discovery in the park at Fontainebleau—The swing—Signs of the Prince's good taste—A joint lesson—Rivalry of the competitors—Prodigies of valour of Julie d'Angennes—A journey in the air—Indiscretions of zephyr—A more than gallant déshabillé—If the ladies' lovers had been there!!!—A moment of terror—Confusion—A new Actæon—Jean Finot, the gardener's son—Is a peasant a man?—Doubts and controversies on the point—The matter must be settled—Interrogatory—Did he see anything?—Did he see nothing?—Mother-wit in a village blunder—Embarrassing situation—Jean Finot brought to bay—His answer—The ladies blush—With reason—The King leaves Paris—Mazarin and Richelieu—The King's return—The suffragan's amorous pretensions—Madame de La Suze's verses.

THE court remained at Fontainebleau nine days, and as the way was when we were all young and eager, sports and diversions made a strong and successful inroad upon the cares of politics. Every night the park was the scene of some new *fête*, to which the Prince's good taste ever gave an unforeseen attraction; sometimes it was a ball by torchlight, sometimes hunting, or a ballet with dancers summoned from Paris without our knowledge. But I shall pass over these fine shows, the details of which might

seem monotonous, to come to a little matter for the truth of which I can vouch, and which, slight as it is, deserves to be related.

Everyone knows the beauties of the royal domain to which our scene has been temporarily moved, the place which Saint-Louis called his *Desert* of Fontainebleau. Philippe le Bel, François I. and Henry IV. each contributed to this noble monument, one of the best situated in France, and the work of the most illustrious artists in Europe crowned this undertaking of kings. But one of the most noted wonders of Fontainebleau is, beyond contradiction, the park which René Rapin the Jesuit so splendidly celebrated in his verses, a man whose only fault was that he sang in Latin what he should have sung in French, like a fine fellow from Touraine that he was. The carp-pond, the parterre, where the statue of the Tiber cast by Vignole is to be seen, the Fountains Meadow and the forest offer endless themes for the poet's enthusiasm and the painter's brush. The following sketch concerns one of the most remote recesses of this delightful garden. I am sorry to be merely Roquelaure, and have but a rude pen in hand; I should need Cotellet's pencil or Girardon's chisel to trace the perspectives and the groups I have to display with lines light enough.

On the third evening of our stay, the rumour was bruited about that the Prince, solicitous to vary the pleasure of the Queen's ladies, had prepared a new

game in the park—the exact place could not be named—and that it would be commenced the following evening. It had been vaguely spoken about; the Prince, when questioned, had made an evasive reply, and so matters remained.

Now, men would just have waited twenty-four hours for the promised results, but the nature of women is very rebellious to such delays and obstacles. Many of the ladies considered the postponement till the following day as a challenge to their curiosity, and as they were not women to be denied, they agreed upon a means to be taken to anticipate the moment of revelation.

Madame de Montholon, Madame de Motteville, Mademoiselle de Rambouillet, and the Marquise de Sablé were in the plot, and it was decided among them that in the morning, almost at daybreak, they should secretly leave their rooms, cross the gallery of Diana on tiptoe, and then descend to the orangery part of the garden through the Stags' gallery. Thence each was to set out in a different direction, bent upon the discovery of the great secret, after agreeing upon a signal which was to summon them at the same time to a meeting-place agreed upon.

They were not used to being up so early every morning. So the ladies passed a very bad night; for they were afraid of waking too late. And thus it happened to them, as it almost always happens in such circumstances, that they awoke too soon.

‘ But it did not matter, for ’twas splendid weather, and night was fading with her fair escort of stars, while day^e was heralded by glorious shafts of light wherein the golden splendour of the sun already glittered.

Our adventurous héroines sprang out of bed. . . .
Their toilette was soon accomplished.

We were in the hottest days of August, and the morning air, let it be as sharp as it was, was of no quality to daunt such valiant souls. They assumed a spring costume. Skirt of light silk, muslin overskirt, light mantle, the hood of which could be raised at need, bare neck, and almost bare arms; they might have been sylvan nymphs of the dawn going to pour the dew upon the flowers and watch them open in the morning. ’Twas enough to inspire a goodly pastoral to a ballet-master of the opera.

They repeated the instructions éach to each, then all four flew off, one to the borders of the lake, another to the big lawn, another to the terrace, and the last in the direction of the watercourse. For some minutes nothing more was heard. All of a sudden, exclamations of delight roused the quiet echoes of one of those charming alleys which lead to Francine’s cascade. At this sound the little company reassembled in a group, and Madame de Motteville, who was standing at the entrance of the coppice to show her three friends the way they should take, proudly proclaimed that she had just discovered

the Prince's great secret, which, as will be seen, was nothing very vast.

Each lady wished to say her say about it; but as three of them had failed to find what they were seeking, the least they could do was to try to guess what it was.

"Tilting at the ring on wooden horses," said the Marquise de Sablé.

"No!"

"A theatre where they can play operas for us," said Madame de Montholon.

"Oh, that would be too charming!"

"A map of Lovers' Land to the life," said Mademoiselle de Rambouillet, "with its mountains, its plains, its lakes, and its villages. I remember that the Prince thought of it."

"Something more modest," replied Madame de Motteville at last. "A swing!"

And at the same moment she stood aside to let her three impatient companions pass. It was indeed a swing, but of the most elegant and richly appointed kind. The two big uprights to which the ropes were attached were flanked by two escutcheons showing the arms of France, of which the two supporting rings seemed to form part. The beam which joined the uprights was covered with tapestry hangings, with a fringe of woolwork and silver. As for the seat itself, it offered every adornment to the eye that the constructor's good taste could unite in so

cramped a space. The back and arms were upholstered in red velvet, fastened at the outer hem with a double row of nails of chiselled gold. The cushions had the softest appearance, and seemed gently to invite the beholder to be seated. The wood-carvings, representing vessels' keels and ending in sphinxes' heads, were of rare perfection, and gave evidence of exquisite workmanship.

First came exclamations about the elegance of all these little details. Then Madame de Montholon was the first to advance and take her place upon the flying throne; she begged the Marquise de Sablé to be so good as to push her from behind.

"We are alone," said she, "and it would be a very clever man who should discover us in this remote grove. So here is what I propose: to-night all our rivals will appear as novices in the Prince's new sport. So let us practise, to take the palm for skill, and surprise the whole court by our boldness, ease, and daring. Shall we?"

"Yes, yes."

"One moment, one moment, Mesdames," said Mademoiselle de Rambouillet. "It seems to me that our costume is very transparent . . . very light . . . for the pastime. Now listen, if we had known, we should have been prepared; a riding-dress would have been the thing."

"Are you afraid of the cold?" asked Madame de Motteville, sharply.

"No; but what would happen . . . if indiscreet glances . . ."

"Aurora is a woman, and Tithonus has seen so many!" replied Madame de Montholon, raising her eyes to heaven.

"Very well, then, let us begin."

So the sport began. And the aërial chariot, lightly set in motion, had soon attained the highest point that its scope allowed, and as may be supposed the exclamations of delight were endless. Madame de Montholon was seated . . . she made a heroic effort to rise, but the swing was in such momentum that she postponed that act of courage, and even begged for an instant's respite, because she was losing her breath.

A minute later she leaped lightly to the ground, and Madame de Sablé, beforehand with her rivals, took the abandoned seat. But no sooner had she taken two or three excursions in the air than she turned pale and begged to be excused. Everything was swimming before her, and for five minutes she declared, laughing, though terribly overcome, that the trees and flowers were dancing a grand chain around her, and that she distinctly heard a mingled sound of fiddles and tambourines.

When she had come to herself, she went to rest on a circular bench that extended the whole length of the hedge—for nothing had been forgotten—and Mademoiselle de Rambouillet, agile as a hind, climbed into the swing, saying,

“ My turn ! ”

It was a moment of triumph and delight. The fair Julie^e d'Angennes was as intrepid as she was graceful, and possessed physical as well as moral courage, as she had proven when she had nursed her brother while he was stricken with the plague. That may seem, perhaps, a rather serious fact to present at the present juncture, and the expression may seem exaggerated when used in connection with a swing ; but even when we turn from great matters to small the reader will agree with me that Mademoiselle de Rambouillet showed herself a true heroine on this occasion. Noble souls embellish all with which they are concerned, just as royal hands make a mere rod of metal into a sceptre.

Our swing, guided by its new presiding deity, took the boldest and most attractive motion, and might have been compared to a flow of swift flashes of light. Within the same second Mademoiselle de Rambouillet's face was lost in the foliage and her feet touched the ground. Growing keen at the sport, which was not altogether devoid of peril, she rose to her feet, and then, upright and without aid, she managed the movements of her skiff as if she had never done aught else in her life. Her two fair arms, pressing the ropes with energy, gave the moving toy the impetus that it needed. She triumphed over all obstacles, and skilfully avoided all dangers . . . she forgot nothing.

In that I am wrong, she forgot several things . . .

She forgot that the wind is extremely indiscreet, that currents of air penetrate everywhere they can, and that gauze—and we must even add silk—are treacherous tissues which do not really defend the treasures confided to them . . . so that first her foot, and then her leg, and then her knee . . . and then I cannot record what successively came forth from the flowing prison in which modesty had till then concealed them . . . What a hubbub must there have been among the rustic deities, who can but have taken Mademoiselle de Rambouillet for a rival, and what humiliation for the undraped statues of Coysevox and Germain Pilon! But she noticed nothing; and yet she understood quite well what was meant when Madame de Montholon, offering her hand to help her friend to descend from the swing, whispered mysteriously in her ear:

“Fortunately, the Marquis de Salles is not here.”

Julie d'Angennes could not help blushing, and turning sharply to Madame de Motteville, she said:

“It is your turn to enter the lists. The marshals of the joust await your good pleasure.”

“Here am I,” replied Madame de Motteville, “and since you defy me, fair Julie, pay heed to what I say. . . . I might win the palm, and in that case it would be as welcome to receive it from your hands as it would be noble in you to award it to me yourself.”

Mesdames de Sablé and de Montholon held the two sides of the swing, and almost immediately the machine was set in motion. . . . All was going well and applause was beginning to be heard, when a stifled cry from Madame de Motteville and gestures of affright proclaimed some fresh occurrence.

"What is it? What is it?" asked all those who were on *terra firma*.

"There is . . . there is . . ." stammered Madame de Motteville.

"Are you unwell?"

"Perhaps your head swims?"

"How lucky! They cannot say I was the only one to give up!" added the Marquise de Sablé, clapping her hands.

"Stop me . . . quickly . . . at once!" cried Madame de Motteville, much more clearly.

They did the best they could. At the risk of being struck by the swing Julie'd'Angennes ran in front of it, and, seizing one of the two ropes, stopped it by one or two sharp jerks in succession. Madame de Motteville, questioned from three sides at once, replied at length as best she could:

"Mesdames, we thought we were alone?"

"Of course . . . well?"

"We were not."

"Is it possible?"

"'Tis certain . . . there is some man there . . . behind this hedge."

"Some man! . . . I tremble to think of it," said Madame de Montholon. "Are you sure it is not a woman?"

"A woman, indeed! 'Tis Jean Finot, the son of the orangery gardener."

"What is he doing?"

"Oh, I must be fair to him . . . he seems to be planting cabbages."

"Oh, planting cabbages. . . . Are you quite sure," said Madame de Sablé, "that he was not looking at us?"

"I hope not," said Julie d'Angennes, shuddering.

"It would be well to make sure of it," resumed Madame de Motteville, after a moment of reflection. "I should like to ask him myself."

"Is it needful," said Madame de Sablé, who, for that matter, was the least compromised of the four. "Jean Finot! A rare matter! Who is Jean Finot?"

"'Tis true," said Madame de Montholon, "that after all he is only a peasant."

Upon this word "peasant" a weighty and interminable discussion began among the ladies. Was a peasant a man? Was it worth while to practise concealment in the case of a peasant? Was it worth while to take notice of the silent and involuntary part he might have taken in the frolics I have just been trying to describe? Some said yes, others no. The latter declared that a real difference of sex

only existed among persons of the same rank. . . . The former proclaimed human equality in what concerns Amours. I gladly take occasion to say, by-the-way, that I agree with the last-mentioned doctrine. The reasons and arguments of every kind that were used on one side and the other are not to be conceived. In connection with Jean Finot, Greece and Rome, Athens and Venice, the strict customs of Spain and the severe morals of the harem were discussed. Even the example of Actæon was referred to, who, as everyone knows, surprised Diana and her nymphs at their bath when they were veiled in nothing more than mythology, and was immediately changed into a stag, which brought upon him the disaster of being rent limb from limb by his own hounds. But the fair Julie d'Angennes observed very judiciously that none of them could change Jean Finot into any kind of animal, and that, when all was done, they would all be glad to know how the matter stood. Madame de Motteville repeated her proposal to submit the incriminated man to interrogation in due form, and this time the consent of the court was complete, for everyone understood that it was the only way of coming at the truth. Village people are so simple! A peasant would not know how to lie . . . such was the crowning argument that Madame de Motteville put forward, while meditating what she should say; and at the same moment she moved towards the hedge, followed by her three companions,

who, as will be understood, wished not to miss anything of what was going to happen.

"Here, Jean Finot!" said the ambassadress, beckoning to him to approach. "Come here so that we can speak to you, my good fellow."

Jean Finot advanced without opening his lips. He was a tall, fair fellow, with long, straight hair, a somewhat tawny skin, and a dragging gait; the straw hat he carried crushed beneath his arm, his fixed stare, his hands carefully trying to hide each other, all helped to give him a simple appearance such as was most likely to reassure our charming ladies about the fears they had conjured up. But this superficial inspection was not enough for them, for, in spite of these attributes of a bumpkin, Jean Finot was a comely lad—for a village swain, I mean, and likely to be the lady-killer of the hamlet; so Madame de Motteville looked him straight in the eyes, and said: ••

"Tell us, Jean Finot . . . what were you doing there?"

"Why, your ladyship, I was planting of the cabbages."

"And were you doing nothing at all but that, Jean Finot?"

No answer.

"Were not you looking off elsewhere sometimes?"

Then began a great deal of stuttering and sputtering, which afforded no intelligible meaning. Put

the question how they would, the planter of cabbages would not get away from his brief and pointless replies. Madame de Motteville grew vexed and resumed :

“ Come, John Finot, are you deaf ? ”

“ Oh, no, your ladyship.”

“ Are you dumb ? ”

“ You sees as I speaks, when wishful to.”

“ Are you blind ? ”

“ Oh, no such fool, your ladyship,” said the young villager, whose eyes gleamed in the sunshine like two diamonds.

Nothing escaped witty Madame de Motteville's attention. She saw the double flash of those gleaming eyes, and guessed all Jean's troubles ; but she did not mean to let him off so easily, more especially as there was no satisfactory explanation as yet.

“ You do not often have such pleasant visits,” she said to him, “ especially so early in the morning ? ”

“ No, indeed, your ladyship.”

“ Have you noticed the swing that was put up here yesterday ? ”

“ Yes, your ladyship, just in passing . . . no more than to talk of it last night . . . oh, I only noticed it with the corner of my eye.”

“ And you saw that we were practising in it one after the other ? ”

Jean Finot took his hat in his hand and turned it rapidly about as if it had been a wheel.

"Do not you hear me?"

"Oh, yes, your ladyship."

"It is not likely that you did not cast just a furtive glance in that direction now and then . . ."

"I can't say as I understand that word."

"Well . . . I hope we showed you our agility."

Poor Jean turned purple; his legs seemed to give way, and assuredly if he had been a susceptible damsel instead of a plain gardener, he would have smelt his salts and had the hysterics. •Such was the discomposure he showed that Madame de Motteville whispered to Mademoiselle de Rambouillet:

"Look, Julie, would not you think he was feeling ill?"

Then she turned towards the lad.

"What is the matter?" she resumed.

"Nothing . . . oh, nothing . . . only I couldn't quite make out what your ladyship said, you see."

"I told you . . . I told you . . . oh, I don't remember . . . that we had shown you our agility . . . that was it, was it not? Is there anything so surprising in that? Heaven save me! Mesdames, I believe he is laughing. . . Why are you laughing? Why have you put on that silly air?"

"Why, your ladyship," replied Jean Finot at last, with all a simpleton's boldness, "I didn't know as it were called like that. . . ."

The four ladies from the swing looked at each other with stupefaction, and with one accord covered

their faces with their handkerchiefs; then they hastily returned towards the château, firmly resolved not to tell the tale for a long time even to their dearest friends. It was possible they might be laughed at. A full quarter of an hour passed before they spoke to one another, and it might have been seen that they were carefully suppressing the desire to laugh which mingled with the vexation they could but feel.

Before they went in, while they were passing through the Cour du Donjon, Julie d'Angennes, who no doubt remembered in what high regions she had spread her wings, and now reflected—it was a little late for the consideration—that it was not suitable to take such a journey in the air without at least wearing the gauze wrappings of the Turkish ladies, Julie d'Angennes, I say, was the first to break the silence.

“Marquise,” said she, addressing Madame de Sablé, “did you understand what Jean Finot meant?”

The Marquise mistrusted this insidious question as a trap, and replied politely :

“No, dear Julie . . . and did you?”

“No more than you.”

At this time a serious imprudence was committed. The Queen, influenced by bad advice, thought she could reduce the Parisians to obedience by removing the King to Ruel, almost at the very time when the

reviving of the plan of 1617 as to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was under consideration. It will be seen that the hatred of Mazarin had become chronic, and the disease threatened to prove incurable. It must also be said (for I would be just even at the cost of my sympathies) that the attempts made to stifle this deliberation had only served to excite the suspicions of the Parlement, which had upheld its rights of discussion with vastly increased passion. In fact, the policy which seemed to please was that of throwing oil upon the flames, and every day there were fresh differences and fresh challenges.

I can but affirm that perfect wisdom was neither to be found among the Opposition nor among the Court Party; and things were taking such a course, that I sometimes shuddered to think what would have happened if state affairs, instead of being controlled by Mazarin's supple and flexible arm, had been directed by Richelieu's hand of bronze. Who cannot picture the old Cardinal confronting the Princes' intrigues, the rebellion of the populace, and all that formless and confused chaos which was then called the War of Paris? A man can but tremble to think of the clash of those two panoplies of iron, which would have made so furious an impact that one or the other must have been shivered. In my view, it was better that matters should go as they did. In the conflict of the Fronde, Mazarin was needed, just as for the encroachments and fanaticism of the League

the organising and conciliatory mind of Henri IV. was required. It is seldom that the ways of Providence cannot be so explained as to satisfy logic and good sense, and experience has shown me that with few exceptions events justify themselves.

I shall pass swiftly over the circumstances which succeeded upon the King's withdrawal to the castle of Ruel. Everybody knows them, and I make no pretension to be the historian of my country. Many others, less unworthy than I, have undertaken the task, and have succeeded in it as I should not know how to do. It is quite enough for a careless and informal gentleman as I am to appoint himself chronicler of his own doings. So I shall do no more than sketch in light and rapid fashion, and only in their most prominent outlines, certain events which, in spite of their indisputable seriousness, are nevertheless connected by secret and obscure threads with the frivolous intrigues of this time.

The King was soon brought back to Paris, and it was believed upon good grounds that this procedure of the Court would be well received. And at the very first it might have seemed that concord had returned to the several orders of the realm. But this hope was short-lived, and it was soon recognised that the suffragan was right when, at Mademoiselle de Montpensier's, and before an assemblage of more than twenty persons, he said, under cover of the Arcadian style, that the worst had yet to come,

and that the demonstrations which had caused such affright had hitherto been only idylls and pastorals.

For that matter, M. de Gondy was marvellously well placed to foresee the future and weigh events. He was considered to be the chief agent in the disturbances; and he was in fact the real instigator, in this sense, that he knew how to turn the most trifling circumstances to account for his ambitious policy, and that he neglected no means towards success, not even gallantries. He proved it at this period by importuning Madame de Longueville with his insipid courtship, though she, upon my soul, had something better to do than listen to a little fellow so ill-shaped and rickety as our intriguing abbé. At the same time he was paying his addresses to Madame de Pommereux, a sort of crazy woman who thought she increased her own importance by all the importance she attributed to her lovers. None the less the Duchesse de Longueville seemed to lend her ear to his suit, and to all appearance matters were pushed so far that the suffragan more than once boasted he had lodged her in his heart between Madame de Guéménée and Madame de Pommereux. As for saying whether this assertion was more true in the case of the duchess than in that of the former of the two last-named ladies, I will leave the reader, who no doubt has a good memory, supreme arbiter and sovereign judge. For my own part, I am convinced that Madame de Longueville, whose feelings were guided both by sound sense and kindness, had

